

*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*

# RUE MORQUE

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# NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND



There are page-turners and there are slow burners, and the work of H.P. Lovecraft most certainly falls into the latter category. So then, in the Information Age (a.k.a. Digital Age or Computer Age) when we value — obsess, really — over the speed, clarity and efficiency of said information, why are the stories of the Dark Prince of Providence more popular than ever, almost 80 years after his death?

There's no easier topic than Lovecraft for a theme issue, as the flow of fiction inspired by his work is constant. You'll see his name peppered throughout these pages, in nearly every section. We didn't have enough room to cover all the Lovecraftian books coming out, and our cover story is practically overloaded with experts, each of whom have a different take on why his work endures. In terms of having a cult following, he might just rival Cthulhu.

In anticipation of this issue I revisited his world, starting with my favourite tale, the 1924 story "The Rats in the Walls." It reminds me that Lovecraft's world is one of obfuscation, both in form and content. The story begins with a man rebuilding his ancestral home and within just a few pages the author creates a complex back story of the area told through official accounts, fragmentary family history, local superstitions and even ballads involving "Gothic towers resting on a Saxon or Romanesque structure," Druids, the Civil War, a "strange and powerful monastic order," WWI, the Marquis de Sade, the Third Augustan Legion, a Phrygian priest, a voodoo priest returning from the Mexican War and "Cybeleworship." The reader is dropped into a swirl of history, both real and imagined.

When our protagonist begins to hear rats in the walls and starts to follow the source of the sound, he discovers subterranean chambers below subterranean chambers, which create more mystery and reveal more horrors — the remnants of a lost city littered with the remains of inhuman beings that met terrible fates, which in turns leads to... well, I think you should find out for yourself.

Here, as in most Lovecraft stories, mysteries are shrouded in more mystery, investigating horrors only reveals more horror, and vast, interconnected histories place humanity as a mere brushstroke in the bigger picture. To read Lovecraft is to peel back the non-Euclidian layers of an onion with no centre. While this is alienating, it's also enticing to read. Lovecraft's work is full of triggers for the imagination to ponder the unnameable, indescribable, unspeakable horrors born of primordial things beyond our understanding. As H.P. himself wrote in "The Colour Out of Space," "And the secrets of the strange days will be one with the deep's secrets; one with the hidden lore of old ocean, and all the mystery of primal earth."

A typical Lovecraftian passage, it invokes that sense of "cosmic horror," the idea that there is no one divine God and that humans are insignificant beings in a cosmic tapestry too large and mysterious for us to ever fully comprehend, and that to even begin to unlock its secrets leads to madness and horror. Throughout his tales, other civilizations, cultures and even beings have come and gone before us. That sense of things being so much bigger than they seem inspires a sense of awe that's particularly appealing right now. It seems illogical that we'd be drawn to stories that make us feel insignificant, but humanity's narcissism has reached a fever pitch and I feel like cosmic horror might be the antidote to the selfie stick. As people become increasingly self-absorbed, perhaps we fantasize about something from beyond the stars or from the deep to wipe us away. With every lunch pic on social media, those tentacles creep ever closer.

That said, Lovecraft himself was rather a man of *our* time, despite his talk of wanting to be born in an earlier age. His extensive correspondence with other writers, which fostered a community of like-minded weird tales types, was certainly a form of social networking. The way he not only wrote his pulp fiction but offered commentaries on his work and his philosophies about horror — and actively created a mythological sandbox for others to play in — is also very modern. And, well, Old H.P. himself is a poster boy for nerd culture, isn't he? Gaunt, pale, bespectacled, obsessive and bookish beyond bookish, he'd be a great lurker in the dark of geek culture.

But, above all else, Lovecraft is still performing a very valuable service in that he confirms the power of the printed word. His work is literate — to the point of being challenging to read and problematic to adapt to film. Yet, through an archaic, layered and difficult style, he encourages us to imagine on a scale so grand, it's... well... cosmic. In making us feel a sense of insignificance, he also creates a richness of nightmare mythology that continues to resonate through the decades. He is truly a Great Old One.

Dave  
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Design by Andrew Wright

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# POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



**IT WAS WEIRD** being at Fan Expo and not seeing you guys there this year. I missed the *Rue Morgue* booth and all of your ghoulish faces!

**EVAN DILWORTH, VIA FACEBOOK**

[Hi Evan, we missed you too! That's why we have launched the *Rue Morgue* Dark Carnival, coming to Hamilton, Ontario, July 8-10, 2016! Drop in at [darkcarnivalexpo.com](http://darkcarnivalexpo.com) for news and updates! — Ed.]

**DAVE, I ALWAYS ENJOY** your editorials. This morning I received my HorrorBlock with the latest edition [RM#160]. I had opened the magazine on the kitchen table and I was heading out but I was curious to find out what the subject was this time. So I told myself I would read just the two first sentences. Little did I know, I couldn't put the thing down! I sat down, with my coat, keys in hand and I just read the whole thing. It was really captivating! I guess I just wanted to tell you what a great job you did again!

**CINDY WALLACE — LONGUEUIL, QUEBEC**

**JUST READ A REVIEW** you guys did for *Until Dawn*. I challenge the whole staff to try the game. That review in RM#160 was worse than the score.

**@CHAINSAW\_MASTER, VIA TWITTER**

**I JUST READ RM#160.** Loved it as always. I saw an ad for *Count Yorga*, *Vampire* and *Scream and Scream Again* on Blu-ray coming in October from Twilight Time. I went to pre-order from Amazon and it says they don't exist. Please help. I really want these.

**RUSSELL VANGILDER, VIA FACEBOOK**

[It's now available! Also get it at [twilighttimemovies.com](http://twilighttimemovies.com). — Ed.]

**HONOURED TO GET** a feature in legendary horror mag *Rue Morgue* for our *Malevolents* comic [RM#159]! A dream come 'Rue (sorry).

**@GREATBRITGHOST, VIA TWITTER**

**I'VE BEEN READING** *Rue Morgue* since it began and I could only find it at the Village Comic shop in NYC. If someone held a gun to my wife or dog's head and I had to choose only one thing about *Rue Morgue* to be my favourite, it would be It Came From Bowen's Basement. (Sorry Lance, you know I love you too). Always on target and always hysterical while informative, especially John's recent article on *The Creeping Terror* [RM#158], which is the worst film

ever made, certainly topping Ed Wood's *Plan 9 From Outer Space* by several degrees. It's almost impossible, once one starts watching, to turn away. It's a hypnotically and hysterically bad film. Watching people get swallowed by this mutant penis-shaped carpet, well, the first time watched, one's jaw will drop open. Then one starts to giggle. Finally tears have to be wiped from eyes. It's that badly funny. And every time it's watched, one will see something else, like the woman who laughs as she's swallowed. Thanks John, for this great review of a film that should be used in interrogations.

**ROB MORGANBESSER — STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK**

**THANKS FOR STANDING** up for quality, independent horror. The Astron-6 guys [featured in RM#159] have come a long way since *Rue Morgue* put them on the cover with *Father's Day*. I know many people who would never have known about their genius had it not been for that issue. Keep 'em coming.

**JOSHUA LERNER — SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**

**I WATCHED** *The Editor* last night at The Royal, thanks to *Rue Morgue*. Fucking Brilliant! Enough said.

**@ERICBAINES73, VIA TWITTER**

**NEVER PAID MUCH** attention to *Rue Morgue* in HorrorBlock but I've started reading the magazine and now I realize I've been missing out!

**@IMAYFAIR, VIA TWITTER**

**BIG SHOUT OUT** to HorrorBlock and *Rue Morgue* for August's block. I'm a new subscriber to HorrorBlock but to open it up and see your magazine in it... Wow. Just read the magazine and it was a really good read. Keep up the good work.

**DAVID SLOAN — CLYDEBANK, SCOTLAND**

**GORY CHEERS** to Aaron Lupton for his great review of the *Three Sisters* OST in the August [RM#158] edition of *Rue Morgue*.

**@REPEATEDVIEWING, VIA TWITTER**

## EXPIRING MINDS...

ON RUE MORGUE'S FACEBOOK PAGE

What would you title your Lovecraftian sitcom?

3rd Cult From the Sun  
BOBBY RAFUSE

Cthulhu's the Boss  
DON MACLEAN

Married with Tentacles  
CHRISTIAN DARNELL

How I Re-Animated your Mother  
NICHOLAS BURKE

The Fresh Prince of Cool Air  
DAVID MICHAEL PEDDIGREE

Full Shunned House  
MARK POLLESEL

At the Murphy Brown of Madness  
MARCELL FRASER

WHPL in Innsmouth  
RICH VANDIVER

Friends... From Beyond  
SUSPIRIA

Shub Niggurath & Son  
JJ B.JÖRNSSON

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## POST MORTEM

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# Dreadlines



NEWS HIGHLIGHTS HORROR HAPPENINGS

## DON POST STUDIOS CELEBRATED WITH SPECIAL EDITION BOOK, CONVENTION

The late Don Post is widely regarded as The Godfather of Halloween. His studio was responsible for creating the iconic full-head latex Halloween masks every monster kid wanted after seeing them advertised in the pages of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, and which appeared in films such as *Halloween*, *Hellraiser* and *Mad Max*. Though the 2012 sale of Don Post Studios to Paper Magic Group signified the end of an era, Post's legacy is being honoured this month with a convention dedicated to his work and a new special edition of the 2014 book *The Illustrated History of Don Post Studios*, by Lee Lambert.

After learning of the company's sale, Lambert was concerned that its legacy could be lost, so he decided to mount the book project to tell the story of Don Post Studios. He was further spurred on by the enthusiasm and archival photo collection of fellow monster kid Dan Roebuck (a.k.a. horror host Dr. Shocker).

"As I wrote the book, there were a few questions that could never be answered because the only people who could answer them were gone," says Lambert, referring to the likes of *Famous Monsters* editor Forrest J Ackerman and Verne Langdon, creator of the studio's Hollywood Monsters line. "As time goes on, the sad reality is we'll lose more and more of the people who were there and the number of unanswerable questions would grow if the information wasn't preserved. There are a lot of kids and young adults developing an interest in vintage Halloween masks, and they deserve to have this information available to them."

*The Illustrated History of Don Post Studios: Deluxe Hardcover Edition* is 100 pages longer than the previous edition and comes in a latex slipcase adorned with a Frankenstein's monster face, created by Greg Duffy and Creature Revenge Studios. It will premiere at Don-Con, which takes place on November 7 and 8 at the St. Francis Xavier Church in Burbank, California. The convention will feature

a mixed media art show, plus a number of mask makers, creature designers and celebrity guests, including Don Post Jr., Bela Lugosi Jr. and the aforementioned Dr. Shocker.

The book and convention go hand-in-hand, as Don-Con is being thrown by Fong Sam's company, Blacksparrow, Inc., which published both editions of the *Illustrated History*. Sam first became familiar with Don Post when Blacksparrow, a boutique auction company specializing in pop culture collectibles and memorabilia, held an auction for Dr. Shocker, which included many Don Post masks.

"With both feet, my partner [Erica Enders] and I jumped into the publishing business," says Sam of taking on the project. "Based on the responses and reactions to the book, we knew there were fans out there that would want to join us in this celebration. In addition, we knew there were DPS alumni, like Robert Short, Bill Malone, Rob and Cathy Tharp, and talented professionals who were influenced by DPS, such as Steve Wang, Dante Renta, Evil Wilhelm, Rick Baker and others."

Lambert says that, like many monster kids growing up in the '60s and '70s, his fascination with Don Post Studios began with the advertisements in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. He sees Don-Con and *The Illustrated History of Don Post Studios* as representing the culmination of childhood desires.

"I always loved those [ads], but convincing my parents to spend that kind of cash for a rubber mask was as likely as convincing them to let me drive the car," he recalls. "As an adult, I got into collecting vintage Halloween masks and focused on Don Post Studios masks from the '60s through the '80s."

Whether or not Don-Con becomes a regular event remains to be seen, however.

"We envisioned Don-Con as a one-off event and have been billing it as a 'once-in-a-lifetime event,'" says Sam. "But I know to never say 'never!'"

SCOTT FEINBLATT



The cover of *The Illustrated History of Don Post Studios*, and (top) Post with his masks.

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# GENRE HEAVYWEIGHTS BACK HOLLYWOOD HORROR MUSEUM

The idea of a travelling horror show isn't new. It's all over fiction, in places such as Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and Richard Laymon's *The Travelling Vampire Show*. But a real-life, permanent horror museum? Some of the biggest names in the genre are working to make that a reality.

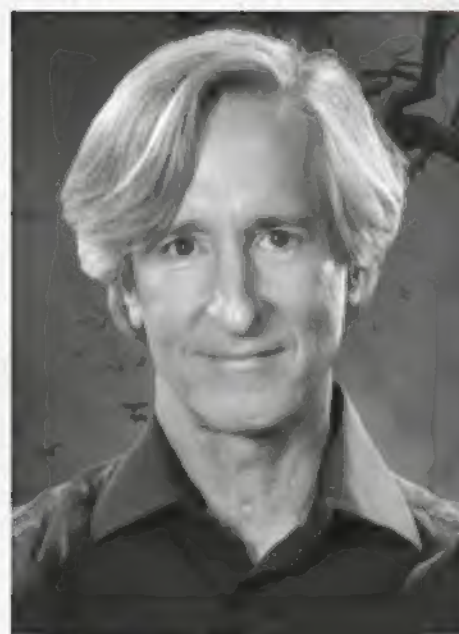
Described as "the world's first educational non-profit Horror Museum teaching the history and legacy of horror films, TV, art, makeup and literature," the Hollywood Horror Museum has some serious support behind it. Clive Barker, Sean Cunningham, Joe Dante, Tom Holland, Sara Karloff, Victoria Price and Jennifer Lynch are working to create an exhibit of items from some of the genre's greatest films, including Ridley Scott's *Alien* and John Carpenter's *The Thing*.

"This was the brainchild of Huston Huddleston," says filmmaker and creator of the *Masters of Horror* television series Mick Garris, who is a member of the Hollywood Horror Museum's Board of Advisors. "I had met him on various occasions, but where this really started to come to life was at Salt Lake City ComicCon a couple of years ago, where he had the *Star Trek* bridge on display. He's a very passionate and enthusiastic supporter of the genre, and spoke to me about his plans, and I couldn't help but get excited about it."

Huddleston is known for rescuing and restoring a bridge set of the *Starship Enterprise* from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The son of Floyd Huddleston, an Oscar and Grammy-nominated composer for his work on animated Disney films, and singer Nancy Adams, who also contributed to Disney films, he's also currently preparing a Hollywood Sci-fi Museum ([hollywoodscifi.org](http://hollywoodscifi.org)), an ambitious three-storey complex featuring props, vehicles, models, costumes, interactive teaching tools and a theatre. The intended opening date is 2018.



Hollywood Horror Museum founder Huston Huddleston (left) and filmmaker Mick Garris.



Garris, director of TV adaptations of Stephen King's *The Shining*, *The Stand* and *Bag of Bones*, already had experience curating horror for the public prior to joining up with the Hollywood Horror Museum.

"I was consulted on the Horror exposition at the Experience Music Project in Seattle, and they showed how it could be done with intelligence and respect," Garris recalls. "But [the Hollywood Horror Museum] would be full-time, completely devoted to 'our' genre, and [would] keep the fun and thrills and excitement of all that's scary in an accessible home."

Of course, the Hollywood Horror Museum needs money to get off the ground and, in September, the team behind it turned to Kickstarter to raise the initial \$21,000 USD required to develop the project, obtain non-profit educational status in California and present the first Walk Through Exhibit at Stan Lee's Comikaze in Los

Angeles on October 30 to November 1.

In the meantime, a travelling exhibit is being created to tour between 2016 and 2018, with potential stops in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Seattle, Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Montreal and Tokyo.

With an eye to breaking ground sometime in 2018, the Hollywood Horror Museum facility would house permanent exhibits including ephemera from Stephen King and Alfred Hitchcock, classic monsters, Italian and psychological horror, and much more. For Garris, a home for horror is an idea that's time has come.

"[Horror is] an important and valid part of cinema history," he says. "Too long now the genre has been a gutter genre, lacking in respect and worthiness. And in some ways, that's a good thing. Horror should be rude and a bit, well, anti-establishment. But the idea of saluting the great artistry to be found in the so-called 'dark' genre is important to me. It's been kicking about for decades. Forry Ackerman's collection was supposed to be the basis for a huge Hollywood museum, but that seemed to pass when he did. Some of the most groundbreaking work in film – and in literature, for that matter – is to be found in the horror genre."

For more information or to donate to the Hollywood Horror Museum, visit [hollywoodhorror.org](http://hollywoodhorror.org).

ANDY BURNS





# TWISTED TWINS MAKE TV DEBUT WITH *HELLEVATOR*

After staking a claim in both cinema and comic books, Jen and Sylvia Soska are coming to television. *Hellevator*, a new "survival horror" game show, features the Twisted Twins as hosts/taskmasters.

A collaboration between the Game Show Network (GSN), the Soskas and Blumhouse Productions (the company behind horror franchises *Paranormal Activity*, *Insidious* and *Sinister*), *Hellevator* has three friends travel, via a "haunted" elevator, down into an abandoned warehouse. Each of them must exit on a different floor and complete a "frightening" challenge to earn money for the team; if they don't complete the task in time, the elevator doors close and the taskmasters win.

"It's us versus them," explains Sylvia (pictured, right with Jen). "'Them' being three friends, 'us' being Jen and myself, our *Hellevator* and an army of unspeakable horrors that exist within our abandoned slaughterhouse. ... It's a terrifying experience, but at least they can win money for therapy."

Jen adds, "We do full psych profiles of our contestants so if you are afraid of something, you will be facing your fear(s) on *Hellevator*. Every aspect of the game is controlled by us. They can't see us, but we watch their every move."

A teaser video for the show promises contestants in creepy classroom settings, crawling in tight



spaces, lost in the dark, encountering an area covered in tar and interacting with actors in masks and makeup, giving it the feel of being inside a horror film.

"We were on the same page for a lot of the scares and tone," says Sylvia, referring to working with Blumhouse and GSN. "I mean, we have the *Fear Factor* team reunited on this show! Imagine those minds behind an interactive horror experience where scaring people is top priority."

While too early to predict a second season, the twins — who recently released the prison-set re-

venge film *Vendetta* and are working on the crime thriller *Plastic*, involving a plastic surgeon — are optimistic about the show finding an audience.

"Some projects are just magic," says Sylvia. "This was one of them. ... If season one is the jumping off point, I can't wait to see next season."

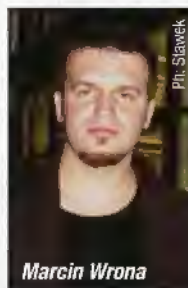
Jen adds, "[Expect] unbridled cruelty and hilarious running commentary. We love what we do."

*Hellevator* premieres in Canada and the US on October 21 on GSN. Check your cable provider for availability.

RON MCKENZIE

## ENTRAILS

On September 18, days after his horror film *Demon* had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, 42-year-old Polish director Marcin Wrona was discovered dead in his hotel room in Gdynia, Poland, where he was premiering the movie at the Gdynia Film Festival. *Demon* is about a groom who becomes possessed by a *dybbuk* — a ghost in Jewish mythology that attaches itself to a living person — on his wedding day. As of press time, authorities were still investigating Wrona's death.



Marcin Wrona

James Franco, which is set to air on Hulu in 2016.

Netflix is developing an American version of British anthology series *Black Mirror*. Creator Charlie Brooker is on board to shepherd the series, even as he works on scripts for a new series of episodes for Channel 4 in the UK. The original version, which deals with the oft-depressing effects of technology on society, has become a cult sensation. The most

recent episode stars *Mad Men*'s Jon Hamm, and is about people who are able to "block" others in real life, the same as is done in social media.

In a recent YouTube interview director Marcus Dunston (*The Collector*) revealed his plans for the sequel *Halloween Returns*, stating that *Community* star Gillian Jacobs will likely have a role, that he'd like to shoot the movie on actual film, and that he's open to making multiple sequels. Dunston co-wrote the script with Patrick Melton, his

writing partner on four of the *Saw* sequels. *Halloween Returns* shoots this fall.

*Variety* reports that Studio 8 has brought on *The Witch* director Robert Eggers to write and direct a remake of the classic F.W. Murnau 1922 silent film *Nosferatu*. The film, long regarded as an unofficial adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, was remade once before in 1979, by Werner Herzog. The still untitled Eggers film will follow the director's next project, *The Knight*, also from Studio 8.

Though publisher EA Games doesn't appear to have interest in resurrecting American McGee's *Alice* franchise, in an interview with IGN regarding his support of fans' online petition for a third installment, McGee said, "signing the petition is as good a place to start as any to help our *Alice* fans at EA make the case that the world is ready for another game." McGee also stated that "*Alice* would be an amazing showcase for [virtual reality]." The second, *Alice: Madness Returns*, was released in 2011.

ANDY BURNS

## MONSTRO BIZARRO

In his new book, *Chupacabra Road Trip*, author Nick Redfern not only details his searches for the elusive goat-sucker in Puerto Rico, The United States and Mexico, but also sheds light on lesser known reports from Russia. As in the Latin variety, the cases involve livestock turning up dead, allegedly drained of blood. Russian news site *Pravda* reported a 2005 incident where sheep in the village of Gavrilovka "fell victim to the night-time vampire." The unidentified killer also hit the hamlets of Vozdvizhenka and Shishma, racking up a death toll of more than 30 cattle. An eyewitness claimed: "It looked like an enormous dog that had stood up on its hind legs. And jumped like a kangaroo." In 2011, *Moscow News* reported: "A blood-sucking creature is preying upon goats near Novosibirsk. Horrified farmers and smallholders are confronted by the drained corpses of their livestock in the morning, bloodless and bearing puncture marks to the neck."

LYLE BLACKBURN

MORE MONSTRO BIZARRO AT RUE-MORQUE.COM



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# CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

CASE NO.

161

*Ichu the Killer* and *Audition* director Takashi Miike cites Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as his favourite horror movie

A Kentucky man was recently caught digging up the 30-year-old grave of his father while shouting Bible verses. He allegedly told the police constable who confronted him that he was exhuming his dad so he could go to heaven.

In *Clive Barker's A to Z of Horror*, Tom Savini cites Lon Chaney, Sr. as his earliest influence, after seeing 1957's *Man of a Thousand Faces* when he was thirteen years old.

A nineteen-year old Houston man died this summer after the gun he was taking selfies with accidentally went off, shooting him in the throat.

In the commentary track for *Shocker*, Wes Craven reveals that the two biggest influences on the film are *The Hidden* (1987) and John Carpenter's *The Thing*.

After a vicious storm tore through the Irish town of Collooney, residents found a skeleton tangled in the roots of a 200-year-old fallen tree. The bones are approximately 1000 years old and indicate the man met a violent demise

Earlier this year, paranormal investigator Zak Bagans purchased pathological/assisted suicide advocate Jack Kevorkian's 1968 Volkswagen van around \$30,000 USD. It's believed Kevorkian helped people die in the vehicle via his "homemade suicide machine."

A North Carolina man was arrested this summer after attacking a woman with an axe while outfitted in a clown mask and multi-coloured wig

To prepare for his voice role of Billy, the prank-calling killer in *Black Christmas*, Nick Mancuso stood on his head in order to compress his thorax to get the right sound for the murderer's voice.

A 36-year-old Maine man has been arrested for spray-painting pictures of Bigfoot on a number of buildings in and around Kennebunk Beach.

Fritz Lang's 1931 film *M* was allegedly based on real-life serial killer Peter Kürten, who was known as the "Vampire of Düsseldorf" after he confessed to drinking his victims' blood. Lang denied the connection, but several countries still released the movie as *The Vampire of Düsseldorf*.

*A Nightmare on Elm Street* star Heather Langenkamp and her husband, David LeRoy Anderson, own AFX Studio, which has done effects for the *Dawn of the Dead* remake, *The Cabin in the Woods* and the new TV show *Scream Queens*.

Last year, a 47-year-old cleaner became literal minced meat when he fell into a meat mincing machine at a plant in Paderborn, Germany

COMPILED BY MONICA S. KUEBLER  
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT? SEND IT TO: INFO@RUE-MORQUE.COM

## BODY HORROR

CTHULHU

ARTIST: Shane Baker (instagram.com/shanebakertattoo)

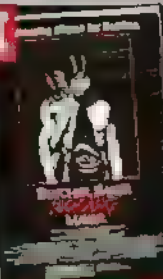
◀ [Lovecraft's] fantastic vistas mixed with historical and familiar sites from around Providence...are a great inspiration. For this tattoo, the client is a big Lovecraft fan and a coffee nerd, so I thought it'd be kind of funny to make Cthulhu looking sleepy and annoyed - [holding] the only coffee evil enough for a Great Old One - after his eternal dreaming at R'lyeh was interrupted.

HAVE A GREAT JOURN OR TAT? SHARE IT WITH US AT: INFO@RUE-MORQUE.COM

## THE RUE MORQUE SICK TOP SIX

TENTAC-KILLS

1. **DAGON**  
DISARMED BY A DEITY
2. **DEEP RISING**  
HORRIBLY HALF-DIGESTED HUMAN
3. **SHARKTOPUS**  
CONAN O'BRIEN'S HEAD GOES FLYIN'
4. **THE MIST**  
STOCK BOY GRIPPED, RIPPED AND WHIPPED AWAY
5. **TENTACLES**  
SAILBOATERS SNATCHED FOR SNACKS
6. **IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA**  
STOP-MOTION MAYHEM NEAR THE OCEAN



### TORTURED TAGLINE

ITCHES, BAKES  
NIGHTMARE MARCH (1982)

A HAUNTING  
RHYME FOR BEDTIME

## FINAL WORDS



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Friday, November 20.



## CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

### UNIVERSAL'S MOVIE MONSTERS LUNCHBOX

In 1979, lunchbox manufacturer Aladdin released this metal lunch box and plastic thermos set, which was unique because in addition to depicting Universal's main roster of monsters such as Dracula and the Wolf Man, it also showcases several lesser-known characters, including Ygor, a Mole Man, a Metaluna Mutant from *This Island*

*Earth*, and even a disfigured Leo G. Carroll from the 1955 flick *Tarantula*. Complete lunchboxes in good condition can fetch around \$80 to \$100 USD apiece, though a mint, unused specimen recently sold on eBay for \$400.

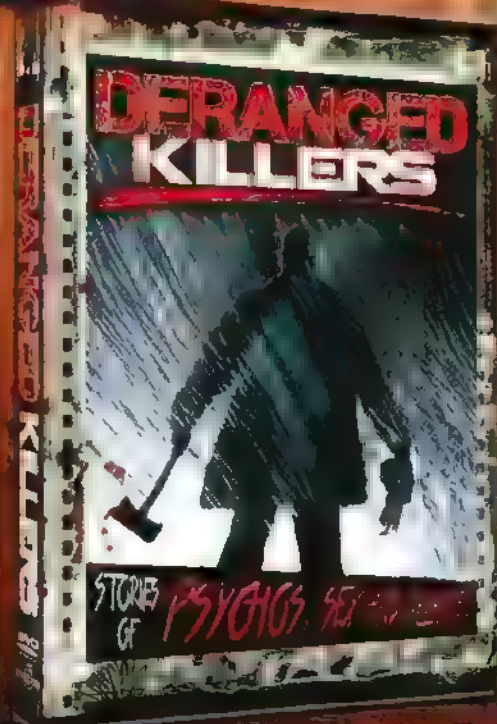
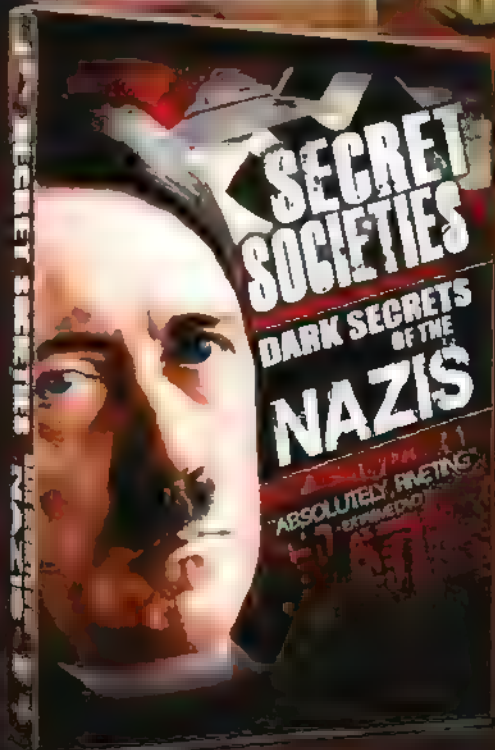
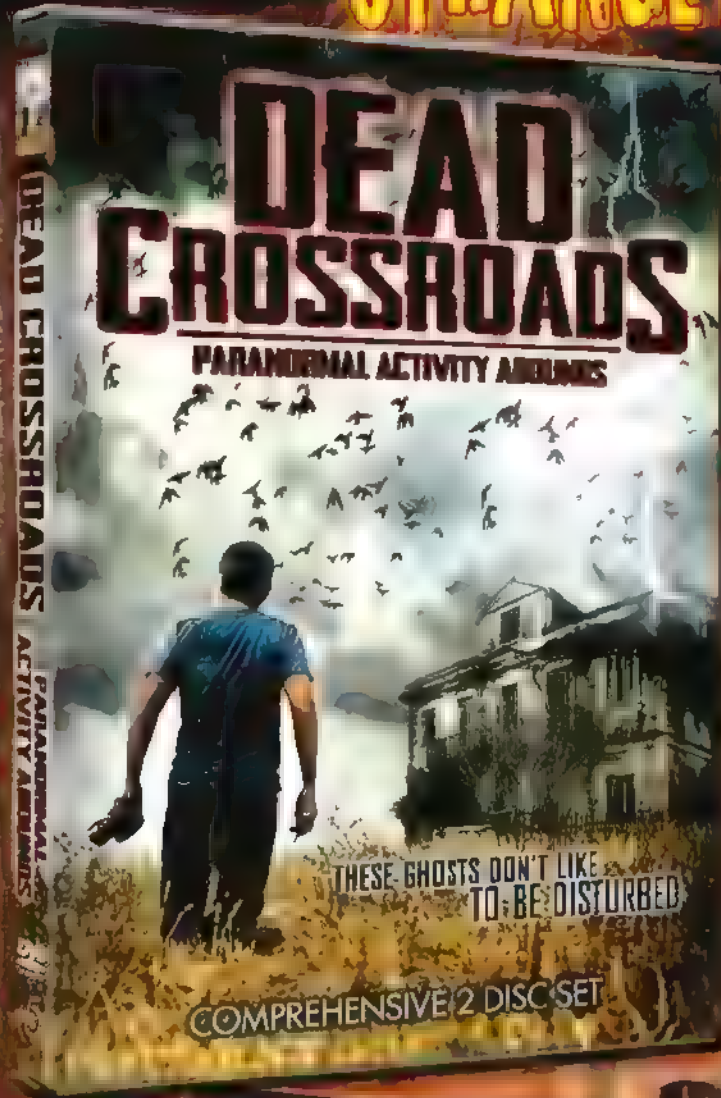
JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORQUE.COM

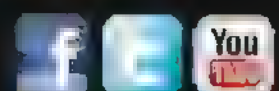




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WE CELEBRATE THE DARK PRINCE OF PROVIDENCE'S 125TH BIRTHDAY BY ASKING THE WORLD'S FOREMOST LOVECRAFT EXPERTS WHY HIS COSMIC HORROR CONTINUES TO FASCINATE READERS AND FUEL WRITERS.

# THE GREATEST OLD ONE

DEJAN OGNJANOVIC



**W**HEN H.P. LOVECRAFT DIED IN 1937, ALONE AND DESTITUTE, HE HAD EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE HIMSELF A FAILURE. HIS WORK HAD BEEN CONSTANTLY REJECTED BY RESPECTED MAINSTREAM PUBLICATIONS AND RELEGATED TO LURID MAGAZINES (MOSTLY *WEIRD TALES*). He never saw a book of his stories published in his lifetime and probably believed the memory of his writings would fade with the crumbling pulps.

Flash forward to the beginning of the 21st century and any publication with "Lovecraft" or "Cthulhu" in its title is an easy sell. This is especially true in the past few years, with the arrival of dozens of new anthologies featuring stories by modern scribes inspired by his concepts – an honour no other writer of horror, not even Poe or King, has received in such capacity. The most recent ones cover the full range, from those edited by renowned professionals in the field, such as S.T. Joshi (*Black Wings of Cthulhu* in six volumes, *The Madness of Cthulhu*, the upcoming *Gothic Lovecraft*), Eben Dattow (*Lovecraft's Monsters*, the upcoming *Children of Lovecraft*), Steven Jones (*Weirder Shadows Over Innsmouth*; RM#137), Paula Guran (*New Cthulhu 2*; RM#156) and Ross Lockhart (*Cthulhu Foreign*; see pg.40), to small-press ventures with incredibly specialized themes and contexts into which Lovecraft's entities are placed. Some of the latest anthologies include *Tales of Cthulhu Invictus: Nine Stories of Battling the Cthulhu Mythos in*

*Ancient Rome*, *World War Cthulhu: A Collection of Lovecraftian War Stories*, *Shadows Over Main Street: An Anthology of Small-Town Lovecraftian Terror*, *Madness on the Orient Express: 16 Lovecraftian Tales of an Unforgettable Journey*, *Autumn Cthulhu*, *Innsmouth Nightmares*, *Elphritch Embraces: Putting the Love Back in Lovecraft*, *The Gods of H.P. Lovecraft*, *Swords Against Cthulhu*, *The Return of the Old Ones* and many more.

Add to this last year's publication of *The New Annotated H.P. Lovecraft*, edited by Leslie Klinger (which marks the second time HPL's major stories have been fully annotated, after Josh's Penguin edition), and the new *Lovecraft Illustrated* series from PS Publishing (six volumes so far), plus the fact that barely a month passes without announcement of at least one more Lovecraftian tribute anthology (not counting single-author collections in the same vein) and it becomes clear that the old gent from Providence need not have worried because his prose continues to inspire the most important practitioners of the weird tale. The best among them do not slavishly imitate his writing but use it as a springboard for their own takes on the notions of cosmic horror, paranoia, racial and sexual dread, alienation and identity.

As David E. Schultz wrote in the essay, "Who Needs the 'Cthulhu Mythos'?", "Lovecraft did not write about Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, the Necronomicon or any of the other creatures of places found in his stories. The subject of his stories was typically the small place that man occupies in an unfathomable cosmos, and his fictional creatures were only part of the means

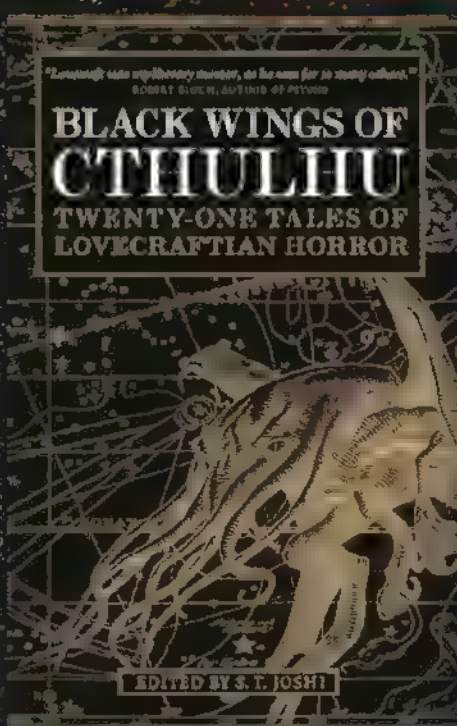


by which he sought to demonstrate that." Some of the means may have changed in the stories by modern writers, but the essence is pretty much the same: the old gods are dead, and mankind has to grapple with its newfound cosmic insignificance.

In the light of Lovecraft's current status as the most influential horror writer of the 20th century, we query some of the most relevant names in the field to understand why we're so addicted to his dark cosmos. We interview writers, including Thomas Ligotti, who's probably the most faithful successor of Lovecraftian bleak philosophy, which he further developed with a style and themes all his own (his two long-out-of-print collections, *Songs of a Dead Dreamer* and *Grimmscribe*, are coming this fall from Penguin); Brian Hodge, who's among the most notable guests in recent Lovecraftian anthologies with stories such as "The Same Deep Waters as You," which are among the best examples of HPL concepts updated and upgraded with quality and style; Charles Stross, a British writer, who took up Lovecraft's new world of Gods and Monsters and made something recognizably his own through a series of novels about "The Laundry," a secret government agency for battling occult threats to mankind (the latest is 2015's *The Annihilation Score*); and Simon Strantzas, another frequent author included in Lovecraftian anthologies, whose most recent collection is *Burnt Black Suns* (2014). In addition, we speak with Lovecraft experts, including Joshi, the most eminent and devoted scholar of the weird tale in general, and of Lovecraft in particular, whose dozens of books include *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*; Jeffrey A. Weinstock, whose work includes two essays on the author in forthcoming academic publications (*Adapting Frankenstein* and *The Lovecraftian Poet*, being co-editor [with Carl Sederholm] of *The Age of Lovecraft* [coming next year from University of Minnesota Press]) and editing three volumes of Lovecraft's fiction for Barnes & Noble; and Jones, one of Britain's most acclaimed horror and dark fantasy editors and winner of countless awards for work on titles such as *Shadows Over Innsmouth*, *H.P. Lovecraft's Book of the Supernatural* and *Eldritch Tales: A Miscellany of the Macabre*. Here's what they had to say about the Dark Prince of Providence.

#### FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, WHY IS LOVECRAFT IMPORTANT?

**STJ:** Lovecraft is an unrecognized master of story construction: his tales almost always proceed slowly but inexorably from beginning to end without a wasted word or scene or incident. And he was careful to augment the "temperature" of the prose as the climax approached so that the climax would carry maximum impact. In this he



#### Nobody has ever come up with wilder, more awesome monsters.

— Brian Hodge

followed — and, to my mind, excelled — his mentor, Edgar Allan Poe, because Lovecraft was able to adapt this "unity of effect" even to novelettes, novellas, and short novels, not just to short stories.

**Simon Strantzas:** For me, Lovecraft's devotion to his philosophical leanings, and consistency therein, are most appealing. His work continues to be mind-expanding to those who come to it before exposure to any of his many imitators, and his work almost never fails to surprise on re-reading.

**Brian Hodge:** A lot of us walk around with this sense of wading through undercurrents we can't

quite pin down. Of sensing things that lie outside the narrow range of sound and light frequencies we can perceive. We know we're in a galactic backwater and wonder what else is out there. Some people find it especially appealing today because it reflects the philosophy that life on Earth is nothing special or sanctified, and could just as easily be in something's way. Lovecraft confirms all that, and, in the end, doesn't play it cool. He isn't above the "Holy shit!" freak-out response that encounters with such immense forces and entities would inspire. And nobody has ever come up with wilder, more awesome monsters.

**Charles Stross:** His early interest in astronomy must have left him with an awareness of the scale of the cosmos, which expanded dizzyingly during his life due to developments in astrometry: from a universe containing a single island galaxy of perhaps a million stars to one containing a hundred million galaxies of at least a hundred million stars each. Indeed, this contributed to his crushing perception of the diminution of human scale in the face of the universe, and so to the way he bridged the gulf between the romantic impulse and the total existential despair that his fiction came to symbolize.

**Jeffrey A. Weinstock:** In a nutshell, the "non-human turn" of 21st-century philosophy is simply catching up to what Lovecraft was writing about in the 1930s. What Lovecraft does — although in a gothic register — is to propose many of the same insights of proponents of contemporary speculative realism and object-oriented ontology: namely that human beings are not privileged observers of the universe or the top of the food chain. Rather, we are imbricated in larger systems of autonomous objects that defy our abilities to comprehend them fully.

**Thomas Ligotti:** I don't think anyone who has ever lived could be called a model horror writer. [But] he came closest to being everything one could conceive in the way of someone who saw life in its sheer awfulness and alternately revelled in and reviled this state of affairs, then made it the soul of his art.

**WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS A QUINTESSENTIAL LOVECRAFT STORY, OR EVEN LOVECRAFTIAN MOMENT IN ONE OF HIS TALES, AND WHY?**

**STJ:** I believe the finest passage in Lovecraft's stories — the passage that forms the quintessence of his fictional work and his philosophical vision — is the climax of *At the Mountains of Madness*, where the shoggoth emerges. This is not only the most terrifying passage in Lovecraft's work, and perhaps the most terrifying in the history of weird fiction, but it highlights a number of important as-

Cont'd on p.23



## FEMALE VOICES, SILENT IN LOVECRAFT'S TALES, ARE RESURRECTED TO REWRITE THE OLD GENT'S WORLD

# BEYOND THE WALL OF MEN

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

W

The relative absence of female characters in his fiction is striking, even for an age when genre fiction was clearly a male world. Two new anthologies bring a fresh, female perspective to Lovecraftian prose, dealing with issues of sex, gender, body autonomy, body horror, repulsion and sexism: *Dreams from the Witch House*, edited by Lynne Jamneck, and *She Walks in Shadows*, edited by Silvia Moreno-Garcia and Paula R. Stiles [RM#155].

This is an opportunity to hear prominent female voices in today's Lovecraftian world talk about how inspiring or problematic the author is from their perspective.

"Lovecraft is as problematic as many authors of that time period," says Moreno-Garcia, "though he exalts biological horrors (and within that notions of the Other racialized and in other forms) more than many of his contemporaries and thus may be more unpalatable to a wider array of people because it's just so obvious what he's going on about. I think of him as a prime representative of eugenic fear, and eugenic concerns were very real and widespread in his time. However, that is also what makes him quite interesting, as it offers a chance to respond to his work or consider him from a radically different perspective. We do not speak of germplasm nowadays but by no means are biological fears erased from our society, nor are fears about our identity vanquished. Nor is that sense that the universe is a dark, unpleasant place not applicable to our era. It looks bleak out there."

Many female readers did not feel any particular gender bias in HPL's stories, and one of them was Ellen Datlow, today's most awarded editor in the field of horror.

"I haven't read his work since I was a young teen," she admits. "At the time I found it striking how his horror fiction was all about fear of the unknown, in

contrast to the other developing genre, science fiction, which was embracing the wonder of the unknown. I was a more innocent reader when I was young and I doubt I reacted to his writing any differently than males who

read it at the same age. This is exactly why when I edit an anthology of Lovecraftian stories, I either use non-pastiche-but-Lovecraftian-influenced reprints or encourage my authors to create new stories using the best of Lovecraft – the terror of the cosmic unknown, and his vision – to explore new themes, new horrors."

Gemma Files, a writer whose stories are commonly among the very best in any recent Lovecraftian anthology, disagrees with the general idea that women don't like to read Lovecraft or write Lovecraftian fiction.

"I'm white as the proverbial sack of sheets, mainly able-bodied, functionally heterosexual, cis and Canadian to boot, but my gender does at least give me a bit of intersectionality and allows me to think slightly outside that particular box. It's not debatable that women really freaked him out, with our weird plumbing and our apparently inherent tendency to be seduced by evil or turn into evil seductresses ourselves. There's also a lot of magery in Lovecraft about monster mothers and monstrous births. That said, many of Lovecraft's larger concerns are ones my own horror tends to share."

As it turns out, modern female writers either discard the bits of Lovecraft they don't like or subvert them in ways that would make old HPL roll in his grave. The other method, however, is to write their stories' female protagonists not as symbols of good or evil, but simply as people, no matter how Lovecraftian everything else might get. In either case, their works bring a significant supplement and critique of his deathless prose.

As Files explains, "Cosmic horror – the existential idea of everything outside being huge, cold, malign and permanent, while everything inside is tiny, warm, fragilely 'good' yet impermanent – is a cornerstone of my own fears, something I think most people can identify with."





WE ASK DIRECTOR RICHARD STANLEY AND H.P. LOVECRAFT FILM FESTIVAL ORGANIZER BRIAN CALLAHAN WHY IT'S SO TOUGH TO BRING LOVECRAFT TO THE BIG SCREEN

# FILMING THE UNNAMABLE

by DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

**H**ORROR FILM FESTIVAL ORGANIZER BRIAN CALLAHAN AND DIRECTOR RICHARD STANLEY TALK ABOUT THE CHALLENGES OF BRINGING LOVECRAFT'S WORK TO THE BIG SCREEN.

And yet, there is a film festival devoted to short and feature films that attempt to convey just that through moving pictures. This year the annual H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival celebrated its 20th year, running from October 2 to 4. Started by Andrew Migliore in Portland, Oregon, in 1996, it grew over the years into one of the more important horror-related events: three days of Lovecraftian films, panel discussions, author readings, live events and Cthulhu-oriented RPGs and board and card gaming. The festival typically shows over 30 short films, and eight to ten features. In 2010, Migliore stepped down as organizer; current festival director Brian Callahan

explains what constitutes a good Lovecraftian film adaptation.

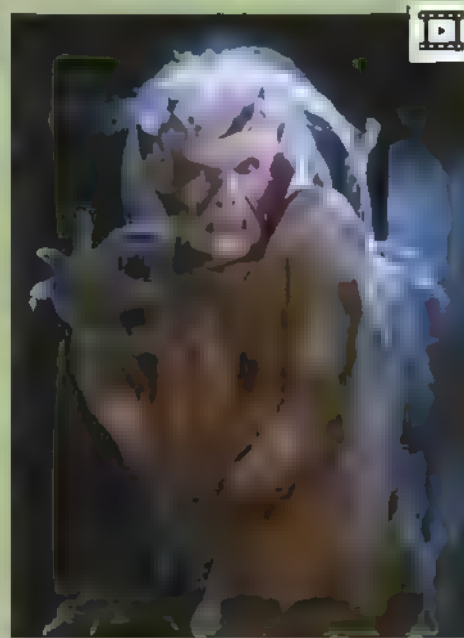
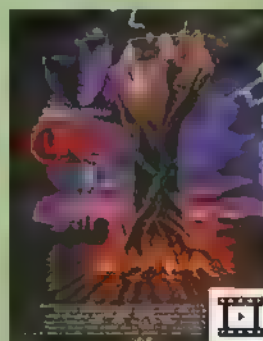
"According to Lovecraft, atmosphere was the most important part of the weird tale. It was never about the monsters or even the human characters. Creating a certain mood and atmosphere was of the utmost importance. I've seen brilliant films that diverge in very central ways from the story that's adapted, but which succeed because they evoke a true sense of the uncanny and this feeling of how unimportant we are in the vast universe. A great example of that is *Die Farbe* [see review on p. 37], an adaptation of 'The Colour Out of Space,' directed by Huan Vu. Likewise, I've seen films that stick very closely to

the events in the stories, but which ultimately fail because they don't 'get' the conceptual meat of Lovecraft's fiction: the atmosphere."

Many of those films also fail because of the usual lacks: budget, time, talent, etc. But there are some problems specific to adapting Lovecraft that haunt every such attempt.

"For Lovecraft, the story sometimes ends right there in the second act, with the revelation of horror, before the third act gets going with any kind of resolution," adds Callahan. "It's not a conventional way of telling a story, especially on film, so filmmakers often need

to fill in the story to make it work, which can lead to serious missteps. Take, for example, *The Unnamable* [1988], which is based on a great



**Lurking Fears:** Huan Vu's 2010 adaptation of "The Colour Out of Space," *Die Farbe*, and (right) a creature from the 1988 film *The Unnamable*.



story, had some really great scripting, good main actors, but then devolves into a teenage monster-slasher flick in its last act."

Similarly, the story that Lovecraft considered his best, the aforementioned "The Colour Out of Space," was reduced to a cheap, clichéd monster flick in 1987's *The Curse*. One rare filmmaker who takes the tale seriously, though, is Richard Stanley, whose next project is an adaptation of the story.

He complains: "Too many recent adaptations have played HPL's work for goofy laughs, whereas I'd like to have seen what Ingmar Bergman, Stanley Kubrick or Andre Tarkovsky might have done with the same material. Perhaps Carpenter's *The Thing* comes closest to getting the overall balance right, but this is not a direct adaptation."

Stanley's *Dust Devil* (1992) showed his serious penchant for thick, mystical atmosphere and if any contemporary director can do justice to Lovecraft on film, it's him.

"It's high time the 'cosmic horror' was put back into Lovecraft," he says. "With this in mind, it seemed imperative to choose a key story in the canon, one that directly dealt with mankind's distressing position in the universe. Seeing that movies take so many years to reach the screen and life is all too brief, it made sense to nurture a project that has the potential to literally be the most terrifying movie ever made."

He admits that the story's setting, a single isolated farm in the New England backwoods and the psychedelic potential inherent in realizing a colour that exists outside the human spectrum drew him in.

"Science and superstition are equally powerless to explain, let alone protect, the hapless family whose lives are blighted and consumed by something literally beyond human comprehension. The powerful negativity of this theme and the simple fact that none of the characters are safe or immune has thus far made the project a hard sell in Hollywood, but I have resisted any impulse to soften the screenplay. We hope to be shooting in the woods of New England next spring..."

Callahan believes that Lovecraft himself is the biggest obstacle in any adaptation.

"He didn't really write action stories, and what we expect from horror today typically involves a certain breathlessness of running and screaming. Lovecraft's protagonists often slowly begin to understand the true meaning of the universe, and end up consumed by the horror."



pects of his thought: (a) the notion of amorphous, indefinable monsters of incalculable power and menace; (b) the baleful products of science and technology (the shoggoths were manufactured by the Old Ones through their advanced understanding of biology and chemistry); and (c) the mingling of real myth and imagined myth (the narrators, when looking back at the shoggoth, are said to be like Orpheus and Lot's wife).

RM: I always come back to "The Colour Out of Space." It's more subtle in comparison with the stories that utilize Lovecraft's bestiary, but that makes it more insidious, ultimately. It's more plausible, the way this toxic alien energy causes the gradual social, mental and physical disintegration of a family. And there's something supremely creepy about that spreading grey blight as the life is leached from the land.

It would be difficult, though interesting, to choose a quintessential Lovecraft story or moment among his stories. In my observance, however, Lovecraft's defining work is all of a piece, from the early story "Dagon" to his last story "The Hunter of the Dark." Tone of voice, type of characters, narrative structure, and many other traits recur from story to story in his work. Despite his philosophy of indifference, Lovecraft portrayed a world in which liam and horror is the fate of those who discover the truth of the universe.

JAW: The quintessence of Lovecraft is reflected in the opening paragraph of his most famous work, "The Call of Cthulhu." He writes:

*The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.*

#### WHY IS HE MORE POPULAR NOW THAN EVER BEFORE?

Stephen Jones: I think the simple answer is that his fiction is much more accessible today. Back in the 1920s and '30s, when Lovecraft was originally being published, only a small number of people could read his work in amateur press publications or specialist pulp magazines. These days we can access our fiction on numerous platforms and in countless formats, which means that anybody who wants to read Lovecraft can now find his stories at their fingertips.

LL: A good many people are enamoured of Lovecraft's imagination, particularly when it comes to the monsters he created. These entities make for entertaining comic books, video games, role-playing games and all kinds of amusement of that sort.

SS: Man has always thought of himself as the centre of the universe, and as time has progressed he's found that to be less and less of the case. Lovecraft's cosmicism was a natural extension of this. With our ever-increasing knowledge of the universe and our place in it, and our shared decay of the higher powers that once buoyed us, it's only natural that we seek out fiction that conforms to this new order.

STJ: I do think that Lovecraft's dense, richly textured, and at times archaic prose style has been a major reason why he continues to be read. That style may be "difficult" for some, but it creates a kind of incantatory effect that allows the weird conceptions to seem insidiously real and vivid.

BH: It starts with a truly incredible vision that ranges from deep space to deep oceans. It's set at a crossroads where there's been a head-on collision of hard science and occult magic. You can step into it wherever you want. It's not a series. You don't have to read anything in order. Each bit is self-contained, but fits into a larger whole. Plus, there's a feverishness to the way Lovecraft unfolds things that really sells the intensity. I've seen his Mythos stories described as being more like forensic investigations than character-driven narratives, and that's apt, because he showed little knack for characterization. But he played to his strengths, and in going from grounded openings to these wild revelations, the effect is like having the facade of everyday reality ripped away and seeing what lies behind it.

JAW: Contemporary culture tends to celebrate rather than revile the outsider and much of HPL's fiction (as in "The Outsider") adopts the perspective of the alienated loner. I think Lovecraft's "cosmicism" – his anti-Humanist rejection of anthropocentrism – appeals to many contemporary readers, as does his atheism. There is also something congruent between his representations of the precariousness of human existence and the contemporary awareness of the possibility of global apocalypse as a consequence of global warming, global pandemics and nuclear weapons.

#### WHO ARE SOME OF THE KEY PEOPLE KEEPING THE LOVECRAFTIAN UNIVERSE ALIVE?

JAW: Arkham House was founded by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei in 1939 to preserve Lovecraft's fiction. Few other authors, however deserving, have enjoyed similar efforts to ensure the perpetuation of their legacies. Connected to



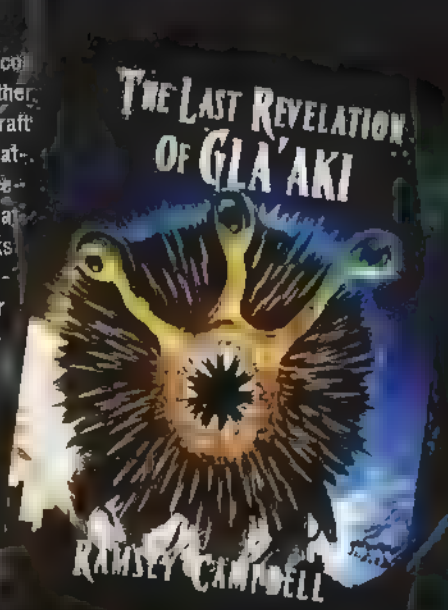
his [unclear] was [unclear] craft's [unclear] monumental correspondence and his encouragement of other authors who helped to establish the "Lovecraft circle." As Poe once quipped, "To be appreciated you must be read," and together the Lovecraft circle and Arkham House ensured that Lovecraft continued to be read. His works found their way into the hands of many influential contemporary makers of popular culture — among them Neil Gaiman, Guillermo del Toro, John Carpenter and China Miéville — who have, in turn, created their own Lovecraftian works.

**BH:** August Derleth's impact is incalculable, because he devoted a lifetime to publishing and promoting it. Few writers have had that tireless a champion. He gave Lovecraft decades to be discovered beyond his initial *Weird Tales* audience, by both general readers and an army of future writers.

**SJ:** I read so much Lovecraftian fiction that is just a slavish parody of his writing or concepts, without any sense of his feel for cosmic terror or personal isolation. In fact, I sometimes wonder if these writers have even read more than one or two of the original stories before knocking off their own pastiches — especially when it comes to the Cthulhu Mythos itself. On the other hand, there are many writers out there who are not only "true descendants" of Lovecraft but have, in many instances, surpassed his work in the quality of their writing. Of these, I would say that Ramsey Campbell still stands head and shoulders above the pack, but I would also point to newer writers such as Caitlin R. Kiernan, Simon Strantzas and Laird Barron — to name only a few who have truly captured the "spirit" of Lovecraft's fiction in their own work.

**SS:** The most successful Lovecraftian work doesn't have much to do with Lovecraft. It's about communicating Lovecraft's philosophical underpinnings and recontextualizing them for the current era. It's through this that we see the works of T.E.D. Klein, Michael Shea and Laird Barron — a hybrid of Lovecraft's bugaboos and their own.

**ST:** I have very high regard for some novels that have emerged in the past few decades: William Browning Spencer's *Résumé with Monsters* (1995), Donald Tyson's *Alhazred* (2006), Rick Dakan's *The Cthulhu Cult* (2011), Jonathan Thomas' *The Color Over Occam* (2012). The short stories of Caitlin R. Kiernan are transcendently brilliant evocations of the essence of Lovecraft, written in a gorgeous and sensuous prose that is all her own. Many other writers, such as Ann K. Schwader, Lois H. Gresh and Cody Goodfellow, have done outstanding work in the Lovecraftian short story. ... In my mind, the neo-Lovecraftian work of the past 30 or 40 years has been re-



markably high in quality, at least when written by professionals knowledgeable in the basic thrust of Lovecraft's work.

#### WHY DO SO MANY WRITERS WANT TO EXPAND ON HIS MYTHOLOGY?

**BH:** It mainly comes down to the Cthulhu Mythos, defined by those twenty-odd stories. It helped, too, that Lovecraft wasn't the least bit proprietary about his creations. He open-sourced the mythology and happily invited other writers to come play in his yard. And it's a big yard.

**STJ:** He was careful to provide only the bare outlines of his mythology — it underwent significant alterations even in the ten years Lovecraft himself was working on it. This has allowed others to "fill in the gaps" or to take it in directions that Lovecraft could never have envisioned, into the realms of science fiction, detective/noir fiction, even romance and erotica. ... The Cthulhu Mythos was deliberately left "unfinished" by Lovecraft; he provided only a kind of skeletal framework that other writers could flesh out in their own ways. He always encouraged his fellow writers not to write mechanical pastiches of his

Mythos, but to use it as a springboard for their own ideas and moods and conceptions.

**CS:** Lovecraft's shortcomings are legendary. From his prose style (frequently purple and florid) to his snobbery and racism (extreme by modern standards, notable even in his own day) — there are plenty of things wrong with his work. However, he gave us an extremely valuable tool for writing genre fiction. It's been said that science fiction is the literature of the sense of wonder — Look at the universe! Isn't this stuff amazing? — but Lovecraft pioneered its emotional inverse: the chilly apprehension of human insignificance in the pitiless face of infinity, the sense of dread. And this is an important tool in the post-1945 era, with our own apprehension that humanity has the ability to render itself extinct. His mythos work leaves us a fine play-chest to loot and rework for tales that reframe humanity in a bigger, scarier context; other corners are best left untouched.

**TL:** Being influenced by Lovecraft is not at all the same as "building on his attitude and world-view." No one has ever done that. Lovecraft was unique as a person and this translated into a body of unique writing. When it comes down to it, I find it practically impossible to imagine that someone would choose to be unique in the manner of Lovecraft. There are a good many people that other people wish they could be or wish they could have been. I believe vanishingly few of us will ever be heard to say, "I wish I could have been H.P. Lovecraft."



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FILM

MARCHÉ DU

# MEAT MARKET

by JUSTIN McCONNELL

**H**AVE YOU EVER WONDERED HOW AN INDEPENDENT HORROR FILM GETS RELEASED INTO THE WORLD? How it is that some films break through and find mainstream success, while others disappear with little fanfare or distribution? With the prevalence of behind-the-scenes documentaries and bonus features the past couple of decades, horror fans have had plenty of opportunities to get glimpses of "how the sausage is made," but have you ever wondered how it ultimately gets sold?

Every independent film fan has heard of the elusive "festival pick-up," where some deep-pocketed Distribution God swoops in and drops a fat sack of cash in front of someone, and in turn births a new filmmaking legend. It's the golden ticket many naïve filmmakers spend their entire career striving for, after all, we all know about the discovery of talents such as Quentin Tarantino and Kevin Smith. What is discussed less, and therefore remains a murky and abstract concept, are the film markets.

Every year multiple markets take place around the world, the most important of which are the American Film Market (in Los Angeles), European Film Market (Berlin), MIPCOM (Cannes), TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) and Marché du Film (Cannes). There are dozens of smaller markets, as well, including some that focus exclusively on genre, such as Frontières (part of the Fantasia Film Festival).

Having previously attended the American Film Market, TIFF and Frontières, I had the pleasure of going to my first Marché du Film in Cannes earlier this year. I made the trip for various reasons (including shopping a slate

of feature films I'm attached to as either producer or director), but while I was there I made it a point to sit down with several people, including sales agents, fellow filmmakers and producers, to talk about just how genre film is sold at a market like this.

"Marché du Film is essentially like a swap meet or flea market, but instead of people selling fish, rugs or antiques, they're selling films," remarks Daisy Hamilton, Director of Business Development for TriCoast Worldwide, an indie distributor with a slew of genre films under its belt, including the South African zombie hit *The Dead*. "Each country has a number of buyers that will go around looking to license those films for their territory."

James Flor, managing partner of Raven Banner Entertainment, the Canadian company behind *Manborg*, *WolfCop* and *Turbo Kid*, puts it even more succinctly: "It's basically a trade show. All the sales companies have booths."

This is what struck me first as I entered one of the three main show floors of the market: the sheer size of it all, and the insane volume of titles, many of which will never see the light of day. Moreover, the amount of horror and genre-related films on display is staggering. A new piece of gory poster art is waiting around every corner, down every aisle. Everywhere you turn is a zombie, a werewolf, or, as seemed to be the trend this year, a shark.

"There are definitely more films made today than ever before," states Jordan Fields, Associate Vice President of Acquisitions at prolific genre film distributors Shout! Factory/Scream Factory. "Completely saturated. It makes my job a little harder because I have to weave through so much to find the gems. Everybody is making movies."





So how does a title stand out and make sales in this kind of environment, where supply is much higher than demand? What kind of results can someone expect bringing their project to the market in hopes of chasing that elusive deal?

Enter Jason William Lee, a Canadian director who brought his work-in-progress horror-thriller, *The Evil in Us*. He's ready to do almost anything to get his project noticed.

"This is my first time to Cannes, and to Europe, for that matter, so I'm quite excited," he admits. "I'm hoping to make some good contacts, find a distributor, then hopefully line up partners to produce the next one. We basically finished the screener the day before the market opened, so it is going to be tough to get distributors and sales agents to look at it beforehand. Hopefully we can use our charm to wrangle up a few extra meetings while we're down there. If not, we may have to streak the lobby or something to get some attention."

Lee's co-producer, Michael Gyori, adds, "We want this film to be a stepping stone to a higher budget for our next film."

Similarly, the German team behind *Sky Sharks* (skysharks.tv) is approaching the market without a finished film to sell. What they do have in their corner is Raven Banner representing the movie, some impressive poster art and an eye-catching sales trailer (including VFX by the same company that creates the dragons in *Game of Thrones*). They are clearly prepared to make a strong impact.

"It is my 21st Cannes Market in a row," producer Yazid Benfeghoul explains. "Every talk you have and every new person you meet is enriching and instructive. We want to sell as many territories as possible. I sound like some naïve child on a beauty pageant where they say, 'I want world peace.' But it's true; we have a product that might scare some territories off for good. Let's see who likes it. Depending on how much money we get, we have to cut [the budget] down, or boost up."

Considering the film in question is about an attacking fleet of flying-shark-riding Nazi zombies, their results at the market could mean the difference between polished and campy.

It becomes clear early on, in both my own meetings and hearing about those of others, that preparation is the key element to success. Writer/director Patricia Chica (patriciachica.wix.com), whose short film *A Tricky Treat* is playing at the market, agrees.

"My advice for first-timers is to prepare for the trip at least one month in advance. Set three major goals you'd like to achieve during the festival in order to stay focused and get the results you want. I personally like to have a good idea of my itinerary by requesting meetings with decision-makers, buyers and potential co-production partners several weeks in advance."

Filmmaker Julian Richards, who such cult horror movies *The Last Horror Movie* and *Dark-*

*lands*, and is the CEO of Jinge Films (jingeFilms.com), believes marketing should begin at inception of the idea itself. He also believes it's tougher than ever right now for horror filmmakers.

"Know the market before you decide what film to make, and know the value of your film before you calculate your budget," he advises. "Drama and comedy are impossible without significant cast. Horror is oversaturated and straight-to-video is a shrinking and increasingly conservative platform. Sci-fi action and war films are currently getting the most traction. Think about the US Market. America sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold. If you can break America, you can break the world."

Avi Lerner, CEO of Millennium Films/Nu Image and producer of *The Expendables* trilogy, gets right down to the heart of it: "If you cannot sell it, you will never make it. If you can sell it, you'll make it."

Once a film is signed, strategy is of utmost

importance. Michael Paszt, managing partner at Raven Banner, believes "First impressions are everything. You can have the best film but if you can't draw in a distributor in 90 seconds with a great trailer and a slick poster then they just move on."

His business partner, Fler, adds, "Knowing the buyers and territories is important. Not trying to push titles you know will not fit a specific market. For example, some territories simply do not release overly violent titles."

Because the horror market is so saturated right now, something original is more important than following sales trends, according to many buyers. Nick Donnermeyer, Executive Vice President of Acquisitions and Production at Bleiberg Entertainment/Compound B, has very strong feelings about what works.

"For traditional horror, it is imperative to actually go out and make a great film," he says. "It's not like the post-Saw era when people were just



Killing It At Cannes: Market films *The Evil Within Us*, and (top) *Sky Sharks*. (opposite) James Fler (top of inset) and Michael Paszt of Raven Banner, and more bloody imagery from *The Evil Within Us*.





cobbling together whatever torturous nonsense they could and then selling it for decent money. Now, audiences are demanding horror to be excellent, or they'll simply ignore it, for the most part. In one way, that's quite frustrating because it makes financing some projects more difficult. But hopefully it will separate the truly determined filmmakers from those who are just dabbling."

Despite the current saturation, the future of horror actually appears bright, sales-wise. Richards, for example, believes things have really changed in the genre's favour.

"Right now is an exciting time for genre filmmaking. It's increasingly becoming an important part of the industry. After years of discrimination we are learning to stand on our own two feet, and the industry is finally embracing the mutant."

He explains that there are now genre film festival "mixers" in Cannes, as well as Croatia, Estonia, Finland and Montreal, where horror-friendly sales companies such as Jinga, MPI, Raven Banner and XYZ look for content.

While many in the industry believe the home video market, especially physical media, is dying, not everyone agrees. Fields believes this is particularly true when it comes to the horror genre.

"I think the horror fan is a smart person, and I think if you give them a smart, scary movie, they're going to buy it, they're going to embrace it. So we're looking for smart, scary movies. I think more than almost any other fanbase, the horror fan is a collector. In this age of Netflix, Amazon and Hulu, and all these digital platforms, the content can be there, and then the next day can go away. And I think the collectors know that; on a kind of visceral level they just want to make sure they have it forever."

With the general consensus at the market being that horror is still a viable genre, but not all of it works for sales, I wonder just what types of films are actually doing brisk business.



**Trading In Terror:** Daisy Hamilton of independent distributor TriCoast Worldwide and (above) "elevated genre" film *The Pack* was being sold at this year's market

**A GOOD STORY  
IS ONE THAT WILL  
ELICIT A RESPONSE  
FROM THE SPOKEN  
SYNOPSIS ALONE.**

— DAISY HAMILTON

"The best is action: big action movies, big event movies," states Lerner. "Horror movies have to be scary. That's the first thing people forget. You can tell me a story, but if it doesn't make me jump from my seat, then forget about it."

Paszt asserts that monsters are always a good sell. "Creature feature-type films are still quite popular if the creature is the star."

Hamilton goes a little deeper, stating the best horror taps into our collective unconscious. She thinks filmmakers should be asking the question: what elicits the most fear from our society at this point in time?

"Make films that approach subjects we are all avoiding out of fear," she asserts. "When a log-

line can raise an eyebrow, the chances of that film selling to a buyer or doing well with audiences are substantially higher. A good story is one that will elicit a response from the spoken synopsis alone."

One particular phrase that comes up a lot during the market is "Elevated Genre."

"I hear these words a lot now, at this market and elsewhere," says Fields. "It's almost like people are admitting that what they've been doing is shit. Or what's out there is so much shit. And 'Elevated Genre' has become a buzzword for 'Oh, but ours is good.' And, well, okay, that's what I'm looking for. If I have to call it 'Elevated Genre,' so be it. But for me, it's just a better movie. So people say it because they want you to get excited and believe you have a quality movie."

Among the so-called elevated genre films at the 2015 market were Nick Robertson's *The Pack* about wild dogs terrorizing a farm family; the violent, bloody punks-versus-skinheads thriller *The Green Room* by Jeremy Saulnier; and the Lovecraftian Euro romance *Spring*, by Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead.

On the flipside, everyone I spoke to believes one particular subgenre of horror simply doesn't work anymore.





## MARCHÉ DU FILM/CANNES IS LOADED WALL TO WALL WITH POSTER ART FOR UP-AND-COMING FILMS, SOME OF WHICH MAY NEVER GET MADE.

The goal of these one-sheets is to grab your attention and communicate a central idea about the movie. I chose five of them that seemed to be horror projects and compared my very first impressions on the poster with what the film is actually about. Just how well did they work on me?

### DON'T KILL IT

**FIRST IMPRESSION:** It stars sweaty Dolph Lundgren. I'll see it.

**AFTER RESEARCH:** Turns out Mike Mendez (*Big Ass Spider*, *The Convent*) is back with a horror movie starring Lundgren! Apparently Dolph plays a demon hunter trying to save an Alaskan town from an ancient evil. Okay, now I won't just see it, I'm anticipating it. Star power works.

### IT CAME FROM THE DESERT

**FIRST IMPRESSION:** Giant ants take on dirt bike riders in the desert. An unusual, intriguing idea for a creature feature.

**AFTER RESEARCH:** It's based on a 1989 video game, and from the creators of *Iron Sky*. Should be good creature feature fun!

### THE MONK WHO FUCKED A LIMOUSINE

**FIRST IMPRESSION:** So... the title, right? I honestly have no idea what

this one is about, but it sure stops you in your tracks. The alternate title, *India's Daughter*, confuses me even more. Maybe it's a vampire movie, considering the blood red - artwork that reminds me of *30 Days of Night* poster.

**AFTER RESEARCH:** Turns out this is a narrative film based on a documentary about the moral outrage in India over the frequent rape women of that country endure. Not a horror film, but it sure is being marketed as one. The subject matter is definitely horrific, but is this really the right way to sell it?

### SKY SHARKS

**FIRST IMPRESSION:** Well, it's certainly a lot more targeted than a *Sharknado*, as far as airborne sharks go. Is it simply derivative, though?

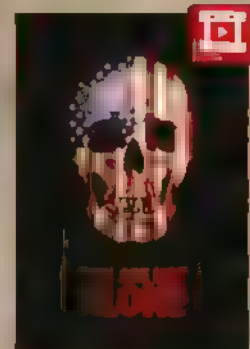
**AFTER RESEARCH:** I've seen the teaser trailer, met the crew, and have been convinced. This one is going to be a lot of fun. Probably the best Nazi-zombies-riding-flying-shark-war-machines film of our generation. Plus, they strapped missile launchers to the fins!

### YOU ARE NOT ALONE

**FIRST IMPRESSION:** Cool poster, but not sure if it tells me what the movie is about. The tagline, "A First-Person Thriller," makes me think this is a GoPro-vision feature like the Russian action movie *Hardcore*.

**AFTER RESEARCH:** It's a found-footage slasher/killer film that takes place on the 4th of July, hence the American flag.

DOLPH LUNDGREN





"Found-footage shit in the *Blair Witch* style is dead," says market veteran Uwe Boll, the writer/producer/director behind films such as *House of the Dead*, *Bloodrayne* and *Postal*.

Fler agrees, explaining, "Buyers are instantly turned off by it. Again though, someone will probably come along and reinvent it, and it will come back. It's all just cycles."

Richards offers a more thorough explanation of why the prolific style may be dead. "Found footage is all or nothing. Either you get picked up by a studio and have enough P&A [prints and advertising budget] pumped into the release to make it the next *Blair Witch Project*, or you are in no man's land, with regular distributors afraid to go near it in case the VOD platforms reject it for being too low budget/low quality."

But there's another subgenre that buyers are steering clear of currently, as well: Richards says horror-comedies are also a very tough sell.

"It's what we call an 'inbetween' — not scary for the horror audience and not funny for the comedy audience. I know *Shaun of the Dead* was a success, but this was produced by Hollywood studio Universal and had a significant P&A at its disposal."

One important thing about this market is that the show floor is only one part of the event. With the Cannes Film Festival running simultaneously, plenty of high-profile screenings are going on while you're attempting to do business. But beyond that are the market screenings, where distributors and sales agents program their material in small to mid-sized theatres around the city, in the hopes that buyers will attend and scoop up the film. These screenings are an essential part of a film getting sold, although they can be under-attended, and are often quite costly.

But with plane tickets and accommodations, the entire market is expensive. Knowing the festival is happening, the city has a habit of raising prices to take advantage of the influx of money. Boll has attended Cannes for years, but decided not to go this year for several reasons, notably financial ones.

"A coffee is \$9," he laments, "All the food is shit and every shit-hole hotel room costs 300 Euro a night. It's crazy, and with the decline in movie sales, it is not worth it to go there."

I soldier on, hoping to make some sales, and after a week straight of meetings, parties and very little sleep, I decide to circle back to see how the filmmakers I talked to earlier have done.

The team behind *The Evil in Us* did not make any sales, but still felt the experience was invaluable.

"[The market was] a real eye-opener regarding the business of film sales," says Lee. "I learned just how difficult it is to get a movie funded and to make money in this business."

Gyori learned they need to make a specific change to *The Evil in Us* if they hope to sell it.

"Those who [watched our screener] liked it



**Lots Of Bites:** Director Marc Fehse (left) and producer Yazid Benfeghoul with the poster for their feature *Sky Sharks*, a Nazi-zombie film featuring airborne sharks, which was an easy sell at the Market in Cannes

## “FOUND-FOOTAGE SHIT IN THE BLAIR WITCH STYLE IS DEAD” UWE BOLL

but wanted it to be shorter. After hearing this from a few people, we asked others to hold off on watching it until we had a chance to shorten the film. This prevented any chance of solid offers being made at the market."

The *Sky Sharks* team, by comparison, did gangbuster business. With the assistance of Raven Banner's solid advertising push, which saw massive ads for the film in all the major trade papers, they managed to pre-sell the movie to Sony for multiple territories, and generate enough early money to produce the film for the higher budget they were hoping.

"We received good news on a daily basis," affirms Benfeghoul. "We pre-sold a lot of territories and got a lot of great media coverage. It was not only successful but very exciting. Crazy how much can happen in only one week."

With my time at Marché du Film drawing to a close, I've come to see it as essential for any filmmakers who believe they are ready — even if they don't have a project to push or film to sell. It's a side of the genre film world most of us don't think about, yet it's the reason many of our favourite films are available.

"It's great just to walk around and see all of the titles that are being sold," Fler exclaims. "It

does not take much to see what genres are being a bit over-saturated, which actors may not be worth as much as you think, etc. ... I think really knowing what happens to your film after it's made is invaluable."

As for the health of the business as a whole, there's still a lot of worry. Lerner echoes this sentiment, stating that his company is "selling territory by territory, and trying to cover the world. Now, say, Russia is in trouble. And Japan doesn't buy anymore because there's no video market anymore, which used to be very strong. We find the business is suffering for the whole world."

Nonetheless, opportunity is still out there in this multi-billion-dollar business. What that means for the future, however, is that the industry must adapt to the change before it comes. This means realizing the old paradigms may not work anymore, and doing one's best not to jump on trends that may become obsolete by the time you get your film done. Being original, creating something fresh, and delivering it in a new way, feels like a gargantuan task for any one filmmaker to take on, but Donnermeyer says it best when he quotes David Cronenberg: "Death to Videodrome. Long live the New Flesh."



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# THERE MIGHT BE SOME DICK-RIPPIN'

SEAN  
PLUMMER



## **F**EAR NOT, OLD SCHOOL ZOMBIE FANS.

While it's true that the last undead epic served up by Paramount Pictures, 2013's *World War Z*, was largely despised by gorehounds for both its CGI gut-munchers and star Brad Pitt, the studio's new one, *Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse* (out October 30), wants to win back your patronage with an excess of nudity, bloodshed, laughs and, well, no Pitt.

"It's as graphic as a zombie movie can get, I think," promises actor Logan Miller, one of the titular Scouts hoping to save their town from the zombie apocalypse. They don't rip off dicks in normal zombie movies but they might in this one."

Standing beside him, also taking a break from night shooting on the film's Los Angeles-area set, is Miller's co-star, Tye Sheridan. He nods his head solemnly in agreement. "There might be some dick-rippin'."

The dick-rippin' may be the reason Paramount decided to fly *Rue Morgue* out to LA to visit the film's set and talk to its cast and crew. While the studio declined to reveal the film's budget, it is pretty obvious that *Scouts Guide*

to the *Zombie Apocalypse* is a much, much cheaper movie than *World War Z*. (That Brad Pitt blockbuster cost an estimated \$220-million USD to make and market, and went on to gross over \$500-million USD worldwide.) Paramount wants you, horror fans, to go see this film.

*Scouts Guide* is luring us in with blood and mayhem: it doesn't have any star power to put on its poster. Sheridan, 18, has evolved a solid dramatic reputation, holding his own against Matthew McConaughey in *Mud* and appearing with Nicolas Cage in *Joe*, but he's an up-and-comer, as is Miller and the rest of the cast, which also includes Arnold Schwarzenegger's son Patrick. The best-known names are comedy vets Cloris Leachman (*Young Frankenstein*, *Lake Placid 2*) and David Koechner (*Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, *Pluribus 3DD*). Talented performers but not exactly box office draws themselves.

So what does *Scouts Guide* have going for it? A hard-R rating that promises "zombie violence and gore, sexual material, graphic nudity, and language throughout," as opposed to, say, *World War Z*'s PG-13 "intense



frightening zombie sequences," which, if we are being honest, were not all that intense or frightening, at least not to hardened horror fiends.

"There are so many tits and there's so much blood in this movie that there's no chance that we are not a hard R," says director Christopher Landon. "There are a couple things in here that might get us in a little bit of trouble, but it's good stuff."

*Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse* stars Sheridan, Miller and newcomer Joey Morgan as Ben, Carter and Augie, respectively teenage best friends and Boy Scouts who try to save their small town from zombies on their last campout together. Joining them is wild child Denise (Sarah Dumont), a tough cocktail waitress at the Lawrence of Arabia strip club (har har) who used to go to their high school.

The screenplay, which is credited to Landon (*Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones*) and Lona Williams, is based on a script by Carrie Evans and Emi Mochizuki that landed on the 2010 Black List. (The Black List is an annual list of the best unproduced screenplays in Hollywood, as determined by development executives.) At that time — and at the time of *Rue Morgue's* set visit last year — the film was known simply as *Scouts vs. Zombies*.

Landon says that he immediately connected with the characters in Evans and Mochizuki's script.

"What I loved about the movie was that even though it's this big type of zombie epic, ultimately it's really about friendship," he says. "It's about these three guys who, over the course of one night, find out why their friendship means so much to them. Every movie I write or work on, the characters always come first, and if there isn't some sort of relatable, emotional story to connect with, I'm not interested."

Landon, who, aside from directing *The Marked Ones*, is known for co-writing three *Paranormal Activity* sequels, says the original script was fun but was clearly going for a PG-13 rating. That was not the film he wanted to make.

"I'm a big horror fan, and when I see a zombie movie, I want to see gore," he says. "I want to see guts and all that stuff because it's fun. That was a big part of the challenge, rewriting the script. For me it was just really like, concentrating on ramping it up that way, of ramping up the set pieces. Because the other thing I wanted to do when I read the script was to make it an action movie. Now it's a full-blown action movie."

Landon was able to get away with so much because of the film's comedic elements, with Leachman playing Ms. Fielder, a cat lady attacked by her own undead feline friends, and Koechner as the Scout leader who ends up not only zombified but



**Always Be Prepared:** Carter (Logan Miller, left) and Augie (Joey Morgan) face off against a zombie, and (top) Augie is confronted by a caustic kitty cat.

burned up by Augie.

For Sheridan, keeping a straight face while working with seasoned comedic actors wasn't easy.

"I remember a scene we did with Cloris," he explains. "We parked at Carter's house and we're sitting in the car, and Cloris comes up and starts banging on the window. So we got her coverage and we got ours, and she was just making the weirdest sounds, trying to throw us off during our coverage so we would laugh."

"Yeah, she started playing it much like a pirate," adds Miller. "And Cloris Leachman, the comedy veteran that she is, can get away

with absolutely anything. It's very satisfying for me to work with that, and kind of surreal in a way to think that we're working with such comedy legends as them."

Landon compares the balance and tone of the laughs and scares in *Scouts Guide* to the classic 80s monster movie *Gremlins*.

"It had some fun with the scares, but I think it is much more of a comedy. I think this movie is more of a comedy, but we have a lot of good scares, and they come from the *Paranormal Activity* world. I'm a big fan of still delivering some really good jump scares, stuff to really get people."

Jokes also tend to make censors wince less at the gnarlier bits of zombie action which, in *Scouts Guide*, include zombie strippers, exploding heads, zombie cats and swaying zombie breasts.

"The great thing about humour is that it disarms people," Landon says. "And so there's some stuff in here that's really unexpected in scares, but they just go hand in hand with the comedy."

The scene being filmed on this particular night is a zombie attack on a corner store in which our







**Gather The Troops:** Denise (Sarah Dumont), Ben (Tye Sheridan) and Carter steel themselves against an onslaught of flesh-eaters.

heroes take shelter. Big crowds of locals have gathered to watch the action. Zombie extras in various states of decay hang out in a holding area. They chat with each other and smoke before being called to set.

Supervising the look of the zombie hordes is Tony Gardner (*Seed of Chucky*, *Army of Darkness*). This is a man who knows his undead well, having also created many of the revenants in 2009's *Zombieland*. He says he was careful to make certain that *Scouts'* zombies were distinct from his previous ones.

"The idea is to try not to do what you've seen before. I really wanted you to go through a flip book and go, 'Okay, that's a *Zombieland* zombie and this is a *Scouts'* zombie' and just know that's the film, that's the tone and that's the word that this whole thing works in."

To that end, Gardner and his team looked to the effects of blood poisoning to create the film's zombie makeup.

"Something I saw as a kid that scared me for life was a snake bite," he says. "It showed the discoloration spreading out through the veins and gave this highly graphic description. The idea of this is that same poison is spreading and you're getting this sense of discoloration. The veins would actually raise and the discoloration would carry through the skin."

Knowing Paramount was on board with Landon's idea to deliver a hard-R horror movie gave Gardner a greater than usual degree of freedom in terms of how graphic he could get with the zombies while still

## THERE ARE A COUPLE THINGS IN HERE THAT MIGHT GET US IN A LITTLE BIT OF TROUBLE

— DIRECTOR  
**CHRISTOPHER LANDON**

respecting the realities of human anatomy

"We wanted to make it bloodier but trying to be realistically bloody," he says. "I was literally thinking about how much pressure is in the body and how far is it actually going to spray, and going for it. Because it's a hard R, somebody could get cut where an artery is and spray twenty feet away and it's legitimate. So we're trying to push all that kind of stuff. The reality thing has been the real trick. I have a friend who is the head of an ER and I got some advice from him."

Landon was also determined to make his zombies unique by giving some of them more personality than that of the usual mindless shufflers.

"[The heroes] have these one-on-one encounters with zombies that are completely original and funny. One of them is the stripper, and there's the homeless zombie. They interact with the zombies in a way that is not typical."

The stripper zombie is played by model Elle Evans, best known for prancing nude in singer Robin Thicke's "Blurred Lines" music video. Although it was her first horror show, Gardner was impressed by Evans' ability to not only endure

hours of makeup but perform in nothing but a G-string.

"She totally has to trust us," he says. "She's a model; she comes from the world of modelling and looking attractive, and that's your livelihood and all that. Then it's like, 'Okay, hon, nice to meet you. We're going to paint you to look like shit and all velvety and gross. And we're going to put these lenses in your eyes and bump up your veins. And then we want you to go over there and pole dance, and your neck's going to get torn out, and you're going to spray, like, five gallons of blood on a guy. And then you're going to fight him on the ground and he's going to take a broken bottle and jam it in your head, and you're going to leak probably another three or four gallons of blood out of your forehead before you fall over on your side on the floor.' She's like, 'Okay, that'll be great!'"

As is to be expected, makeup effects will be augmented by CGI in post-production, but Landon was determined to keep things as practical as possible on set. He feels that, although some of it will clearly look digital, being practical will preserve the '80s spirit of the production.

"We want people to go to that *Gremlins* place and go to that old school vibe, and so that was a big part of it for us."

Landon shies away from telling us too much about his film's kills, but Logan Miller is not shy about revealing at least one memorable practical effect involving his character.


"Me chopping off an old woman's head with a window," he says. "So that was fun.... Cloris also will be eating my ass in the film, so you guys can check out that. And the answer is, yes, I do have a hairless lady ass."

You won't see that in a *World War Z* film.





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# BLOOD IN HOGTOWN



## BASKIN (TURKEY)

Can Evrenol

Bumbling cops enter an abandoned building inconveniently located over the Gates of Hell in this nasty directional debut from Can Evrenol. Though the

movie takes its sweet time to enter the belly of the beast (likely due to budgetary constraints), once all hell breaks loose it gets deeply disturbing and unapologetically disgusting. Reminiscent of Fulci in its vibrant colours, dripping gore, surreal dream logic and casual eye-gouging, *Baskin* is a strong calling card for its director. While the film is far from perfect, it showcases the twisted imagination of a talented sicko who will hopefully grow into a genre force to be reckoned with. **PB**

## DEMON

(POLAND)

Marcin Wrona

Marcin Wrona's final film (he was found dead in his hotel room in Poland one week after *Demon*'s world premiere at TIFF).

is a thinly veiled poke at his country's reluctance to discuss its treatment of Jews during the Holocaust. Israeli actor Itay Tiran plays Python, a groom taken over by an unsettled Jewish spirit, or *dybbuk*, at his wedding. As the vodka flows, Python's condition worsens and his visions of a dead girl turn into full-blown possession. *Demon*'s blend of comedy, drama and horror tips over into the grotesque as guests drink to forget Python's scary behaviour, an obvious but poignant metaphor. **SP**

## THE DEVIL'S CANDY (USA)

Sean Byrne

After establishing himself as a whip-smart genre nut with his John Hughes-tinged torture picture *The*

*Loved Ones*, Aussie director Sean Byrne returned to Midnight Madness with *The Devil's Candy*. His sophomore effort stars a heavily-bearded Ethan Embry as a metal band/painter who moves his family into a house with a troubled past. From there, Byrne teases his audience with cues to various horror subgenres (haunted house, satanic panic, serial killer shenanigans, etc.) to keep viewers off balance. It's clever, and even though the filmmaker eventually commits to the least interesting version of his story, there are enough slick scares along the way to recommend it. **PB**

## EVOLUTION (FRANCE)

Lucile Hadzihalilovic

In an isolated coastal town, preteen boys live with what seem to be their mothers, with no adult males in sight. The boys bathe and play in the ocean, are given medicine and go for procedures at a dilapidated medical facility. When one of them starts asking questions, he stirs up trouble and the sympathies of a nurse, who must decide to either do her job or help him. *Evolution* is heavy on atmosphere and light on explanation. A tense soundtrack and some arresting visuals (a couple of them lightly Lovecraftian) make for a slow but effective creep out. Ideal for art house horror fans. **DA**

## FRIDAY THE 13TH (USA/CANADA)

Osgood Perkins

Osgood (son of Anthony) Perkins throws his hat into the horror directing ring with this odd little film that combines a fairly conventional genre yarn

through unconventional art house techniques with

mixed results. The movie centres on three girls involved in a horrific boarding school tragedy, but toys with chronology to keep the details secret for

as long as possible. Deeply atmospheric sound design and strong performances from the leads keep things interesting through the slow, stoic set-up, and the eventual climax boasts some solid scares. Unfortunately, the story is less interesting than the telling, so it's unlikely *February* will encourage repeat viewings. **PB**

## THE FINAL GIRLS (USA)

Todd Strauss-Schulson

Slasher self-reflection has been done in *A Cabin in the Woods* and *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*, but the concept of modern teens literally trapped in a 1980s slasher film is enticing. Here, our heroine is reunited with her dead mother—who appeared in *Camp Bloodbath*, a *Friday the 13th*-like film from 1983—when she and a handful of others are transported into the film during a screening of it. Despite some great jokes, *The Final Girls* (pictured above) is over-directed, the film-within-a-film is inauthentic (characters listen to music from 1990) and the mother-daughter relationship has a weirdly lesbian vibe. Good idea, poor... execution. **DA**

## THE GIRL IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS (USA)

Nick Simon

The late Wes Craven's last film as producer contains more than a few nods to *Scream*. Claudia Lee plays Colleen, a small-town grocery clerk who keeps getting photos of murdered girls sent to her. When LA photographer Peter Hemmings (Kal Penn) learns about the mayhem in his hometown, he returns, with models in tow, to recreate the killings for an ad campaign. Director Nick Simon tweaks slasher tropes enough to keep us interested, and the *Scream* echoes—two killers, a gruesome opening murder, knowing dialogue—are fun. But it's the film's nihilism, played against jokes and copious gore, which makes *The Girl in the Photographs* worth watching. **SP**





beat zombified yarn *Phillydod*, cult Canadian filmmaker Bruce McDonald returns to horror with this strange tale offering. **CB**

Rose stars as a troubled teen trapped at home alone on Halloween night and besieged by creepy trick-or-treaters. What starts as a conventional holiday horror romp gradually transforms into a surreal genre effort about parental anxiety, filled with off-kilter colour schemes and nightmarish imagery. McDonald cuts loose stylistically and delivers one of his most visually stunning works. Admittedly, the flick feels a bit padded out even at a trim 80 minutes, but it's a hallucinogenic horror ride worth taking. **PB**



### THE MIND'S EYE (USA)

*Scanners* meets *The Fury* in writer/director Joe Begos' fun follow-up to his alien abduction debut *Almost Human* (2013).

That film's lead, Graham Skipper, plays Zach Connors, a drifter with vast telekinetic powers discovered by the seemingly benign Dr. Slovak (John Speridakos). The doc invites Zach to his clinic for telekinetics, but his motives are sinister and soon our hero must face off against the power-hungry scientist. Begos gives zero fucks in cranking out his homage to '80s horror that embraces all the absurdities of that decade's best and worst films. And, yes, heads do explode in this demented love letter to Cronenberg. **SP**

### SOUTHBOUND (USA)

David Bruckner, Patrick Horvath, Radio Silence

Much of the talent behind the well-received horror anthology *V/H/S* reunites for the considerably more cohesive and entertaining anthology *Southbound*. Regret, remorse and atonement are the watchwords in these stories as characters make bad choices and have to pay for them. That includes a female rock band stranded in the desert, a brother trying to get his sister out of Hell, a distracted driver who must deal with a hit-and-run, and a pair of killers on the run from something terrible. Tight writing, good effects and obvious teamwork make *Southbound* a highway to Hell horror fans will want to travel. **SP**



### THE WITCH (GERMANY)

Berlin party girl Tina (Carolyn Genzkow) has her life of friends and fun turned upside down when a homunculus-like

creature starts following her after she attends a surreal rave (that seems to end in her death). Only Tina can see the benign but mischievous creature, leading her parents to consider institutionalizing her. German artist Akiz uses bizarre visuals to dress up a relatively traditional teenage narrative of self-acceptance. Imagine John Hughes on ketamine, with harsh techno providing the soundtrack instead of Simple Minds. **SP**



### THE WITCH (USA)

The best horror film of TIFF is the debut feature by writer/director Robert Eggers. Set during the era of the Salem witch trials and using authentic Jacobean

English, *The Witch* concerns a family forced to leave their village and start fresh in the woods.

But in the cold, deep, dark forest resides a witch who hexes the pious interlopers. Eggers mixes events from historical accounts of witchcraft with tropes of classic fairy tales to craft a chilling tale of evil and religious fervour. In which hysteria over suspected possession is as terrifying as the real devilry. Beautifully shot and masterfully directed, this one cast a spell over the fest. **DA**



### YAKUZA APOCALYPSE (JAPAN)

Takashi Miike

Takashi Miike has made a bunch of Yakuza films, but none with vampires until now. Of course, because *Yakuza Apocalypse* is by the director

not of such cinematic insanity as *Audition*, *Fudoh* and *Nichi the Killer*. It's much more than that. Start with a form of vampirism that causes the infected to also become Yakuza, add helpings of ultra-violence, some completely absurd comedy, a gleeful disregard for genre conventions, a *kaiju* monster, a Vampire Hunter D-like assassin and an, um, enforced knitting circle, and you've got one wonderfully weird-ass movie. As with many a Miike film, this one can delight as much as confuse, but it's never cliché. **DA**

ALSO SAYING: PORTAL TO HELL!!! (USA) THE LAST FILM (USA) PT. TWO (USA) THE GOD

## WRESTLING WITH TENTACLES

by Paul Brown

One of the fest's best genre outings was also one of the shortest: the brilliant horror-comedy *Portal to Hell!!!*. Made by Vivieno Caldinelli and Matt Watts, the eleven-minute short combines Lovecraftian horror and subtle character comedy in the tale of a burned-out superintendent (Roddy Piper, who died shortly after making the film) forced to deal with a pesky Cthulhu outbreak. Hilarious, gory and reverent to '80s horror, *Portal to Hell!!!* will delight even the most hardened horror snob. Caldinelli talks to us about his tentacled tale.

### Why mix mundane character comedy with Lovecraftian insanity?

The Lovecraft element was always there in Matt's concept, but I think the comedy came out when we started collaborating. We have similar sensibilities, so we were just making each other laugh. None of Lovecraft's work was particularly hilarious, so we did something about it. I'm pretty sure he's rolling in his grave.

### Was it difficult to sell others on your concept?

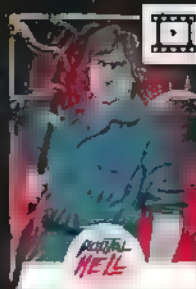
I remember pitching a few producers who just didn't get it. To Matt and I, it was always a no-brainer. An homage to John Carpenter featuring Cthulhu and Roddy Piper? What's not to love?!

### How was working with Piper?

[The film] was definitely written with him in mind. What we didn't want was the Roddy Piper we grew up with. We wanted Jack: a kind, soft-spoken man who only wanted a little peace and quiet to read his book. All it took was a very brief chat with Rod the night before our shoot. He softly said, "I got it," with a nod and that was that. There are a lot of parallels between Jack and Rod. It's surreal. I think Rod really related to Jack and that's why his performance was so genuine and came so easily.

### You plan on making this into a feature — what can you tell us about it?

Only the first act takes place in the building. The other two acts involve travelling to and arriving in Ryleh. It's a pretty straightforward mission movie. Obviously the set pieces are way bigger and badder. We've had a lot of fun so far and we're really excited about it. But that's all I want to say about it at this point.





## A GOOD DAY FOR M. NIGHT

## THE VISIT

Starring Olivia DeJonge, Ed Oxenbould and Deanna Dunagan  
Written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan  
Universal Pictures

M. Night Shyamalan really needed a trip to grandma and grandpa's house after the last decade of box office floppery. It's here he could find unconditional love, despite making the ruefully self-indulgent *Lady in the Water*, receive the wisdom to understand that *The Happening* was conceptually a bad idea, and have some warm cookies to soothe the savage reviews for *The Last Airbender*.

Those cookies are (probably) metaphorical, as grandma and grandpa's house is actually Blumhouse, the studio behind the *Paranormal Activity*, *Insidious* and *Sinister* franchises. It gave Shyamalan a modest \$5-million budget and creative freedom to make *The Visit* as a first-person documentary-style film, and it was just what the writer/director of *The Sixth Sense*, *Signs* and *The Village* needed to get back to telling a straightforward story with an effective twist.

*The Visit* sees aspiring filmmaker Becca (Olivia DeJonge) and her smart ass younger brother

Tyler (Ed Oxenbould) travel to the country to meet their grandparents for the first time, who, due to a family fight, are estranged from their mom (Kathryn Hahn). Becca decides to make a documentary about the experience, while Tyler mostly annoys her. At first, Nana and Pop Pop seem like typical loving grandparents, eager to make up for lost time with fresh-baked cookies and walks in the woods. But their behaviour becomes increasingly strange, with Nana suffering nighttime dementia that sees her acting like she's possessed, and Pop Pop displaying irrational anger. At first, the eccentric behaviour is chalked up to "old person problems," but as their actions become downright frightening, the kids make a terrifying discovery. Moral of the story: don't trust the elderly.

Influenced by the stories of the Brothers Grimm, specifically *Hansel and Gretel* (note the oven scene in the trailer), *The Visit* is a modern fairy tale that uses tropes such as the house in the woods and being fed sweets, while it skillfully exports bedrock childhood fears such as dark basements and having something under the bed. The siblings are overly mature in a Hollywood movie kinda way, and you'll want to strangle Tyler as soon as he starts rapping, but they'll eventually win you over with some laugh-out-loud moments and genuine pathos about their fractured family.

*The Visit* is stripped down and focused — ex-

actly the kind of movie to jumpstart Shyamalan's career. If you were his grandparents you might just want to pinch his widdle cheeks.

DAVE ALEXANDER

## STITCHES ARE SHOWING

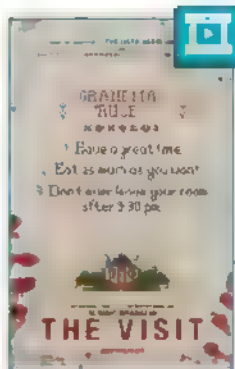
## ARMY OF FRANKENSTEINS

Starring Jordan Farris, Christian Bellgardt and John Ferguson  
Written and directed by Ryan Bellgardt  
Scream Factory

If well-written comedy and perfectly executed jokes are what give you the giggles, it's ill advised to sit down with anything like *Army of Frankensteins*. B-movie parodies or bad-for-the-sake-of-bad movies have surged in recent years, exhausting the gimmick, although they're still without their charms... sometimes.

*Army of Frankensteins* is Ryan Bellgardt's addition to the trend, and although it warrants the occasional chuckle at its lunacy (and gallons of fake blood), it misses the mark with a story that's not particularly entertaining.

The movie stars Jordan Farris as Alan Jones, an easygoing young man who wants to propose to his girlfriend. Despite the fact he's three months late with his rent and his salacious landlady is offering to trade sexual favours for it, he buys a perfect ring and organizes a romantic dinner in his apartment. After his girlfriend calls and says she can't make it because she has to work late,





he goes to the supermarket she works at, only to discover her with the (super-fake) moustachioed manager. He's forced himself on her, but from Alan's perspective, it looks like she's cheating. In a fit, he runs to the back of the building, where he's beat up by thugs, and is subsequently saved by a Dr. Tanner Finski (John Ferguson) and his assistant Igor (Christian Bellgardt). The mad doctor uses the wounded Alan as part of his experiment but it goes awry, and sends them back in time to the Civil War, where a portal has opened and an army of Frankenstein's monsters have begun to leak out.



Although plot holes tend to go hand-in-hand with schlock pictures, *Army of Frankenstein's* major narrative holes (such as how they got to the Civil War and why) just feel amateur. Weak performances and store-bought special effects further detract from the film's fun concept. What could've been a blast of a love letter to B-movies, instead just feels too haphazard and thrown-together to warrant a watch.

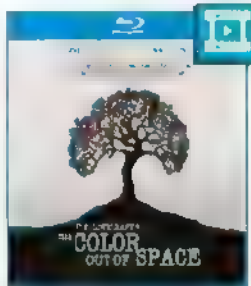
RICHELLE CHARKOT

## BITTER HARVEST

### THE COLOR OUT OF SPACE

Starring Paul Dorsch, Jürgen Heimüller and Ingo Heise  
Written and directed by Huan Vu  
Brink Vision

Lovecraft's own favourite story was his 1927 tale "The Colour out of Space." It's been the inspiration for conventional monster cheapies *Die, Monster, Die!* (1965) and *The Curse* (1987) — but German filmmaker Huan Vu approached the story with more ambition, albeit a small budget, for his 2010 feature *The Color Out of Space* (German title: *Die Fabre*), making its premiere on Blu-ray in a limited edition (only 1000 made) run from Brink Vision.



The story is about a meteor that falls in the backwoods near a remote farm and gradually alters the environment and its people, until everything rots from within and the area is turned into a "blasted heath." The changes to Lovecraft's story are minimal: it's transferred to rural Germany, just before WWII, with an awkward framing story — set in the 1950s — about a young American looking for his ex-soldier father.

While "The Colour out of Space" is one of the best horror stories ever written, hardly anyone could accuse *The Color Out of Space* of being among the best horror films ever made. It's a brave effort overall, excellent in some departments (the black-and-white cinematography, with touches of alien violet), but far from a definitive version. The film mostly succeeds in building

a mood of sombre expectation; it's well-acted, solidly directed and has fine CGI effects and visual concepts.

However, the scale of *Color's* effect is not fully visualized. One of the most inspired touches in Lovecraft's story is his depiction of the everyday world slowly turning inside-out into something alien and disgusting. *Color* is way too restrained to capture the body horror and cosmic terror. It really only hints at the drama of a family falling apart, their bodies crumbling, the sickly feelings of nature gone very, very wrong. That said, the film remains one of the best Lovecraft adaptations so far. It belongs to a dying breed of ambitious, serious low-budget horror films and should be respected for that.

Bonus material on the disc includes a lost scene, a 22-minute making-of featurette and two seven-minute ones covering the science in the film. Exclusive to the Blu-ray are some Lovecraft audiobooks, a trailer for Vu's upcoming Lovecraft adaptation *The Dreamlands* and a mini "newspaper" insert. Lovecraft fans still await that perfect adaptation, but *The Color Out of Space* is a step in the right direction.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

## WORK SUCKS

### BLOODSUCKING BASTARDS

Starring Fran Kranz, Pedro Pascal and Emma Fitzpatrick  
Directed by Brian James O'Connell  
Written by Dr. God and Ryan Mitts  
Shout! Factory

Corporate vampires. It's an idea fresh enough to have fangs.

Unfortunately, despite a near-perfect opening that hints at events to come, *Bloodsucking Bastards* doesn't exactly hit the ground running and biting. That's not to say the jokes don't fly a mile a minute, it's just that they mostly fail to find traction at least until the monsters make them-

selves known and the blood starts painting the walls red.

The movie is set in a pharmaceutical marketing company where all the employee archetypes are present and accounted for. Token slackers? Check. Guys who never matured past fourth grade? Check. Resident porn fiend? Check. Hot HR girl? Check. Keener gunning for the big promotion? Check. This is likely why the office humour tends to fall flat: everyone is an over-the-top stereotype. Things get more interesting when Max (Pedro Pascal) is hired, stealing the coveted top marketing position from his long-time nemesis Evan (the aforementioned keener, played by *The Cabin in the Woods*'s Fran Kranz). You see, Max is a vampire with some very unconventional ideas about how to get the company back on track. As employees either go missing or become the hard-working undead, Evan must end Max's initiative before it's too late.

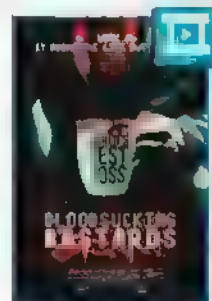
The laughs ramp up after the 40-minute mark, when more emphasis gets placed on clever gags (for instance, how everyone Evan approaches about the vampire threat is already well aware of it) and witty dialogue ("Wikipedia didn't say anything about this," exclaims a character after a dead vampire explodes all over him in a shower of grue), instead of simply offering up hyperbolic sketches of office life. Unlike the humour, the gore gags consistently deliver. The exploding vamp corpses are hilarious and are put to good use during the epic final showdown, and the gearing-to-fight-the-bloodsuckers-with-office-supplies montage is a fun take on more typical arming-up sequences.

In short, viewers who stick with *Bloodsucking Bastards* past its uneven opening act will be rewarded with both guffaws and gore, as the film gives a whole new meaning to corporate downsizing.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



The Color Out of Space







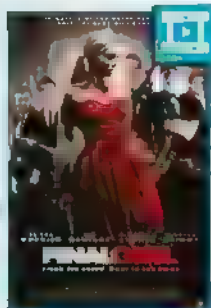
Final Girl

## FEMME BANAL

### FINAL GIRL

Starring Abigail Breslin, Wes Bentley and Alexander Ludwig  
Directed by Tyler Shields  
Written by Adam Prince, Stephen Scarlata, Alejandro Seri, et al.  
Cinedigm

*Final Girl* is the directing debut from former pro inline skater and celebrity photographer Tyler Shields, who is apparently looking to translate his penchant for incorporating violent, bloody imagery in his photography to the big screen. While the premise (and indeed, the title) hints at some commentary on the celebrated *Final Girl* trope, and the cast is made up of some established horror talent, *Final Girl* falters from plot holes big enough to trip anyone running through the woods at night.



The film opens with William (Wes Bentley: *P2*) interviewing a precocious orphan girl named Veronica before inviting her to be trained for a special job that involves punishing bad people. With the promise of ice cream, the girl accepts. Fast forward twelve years: Veronica (now a young woman, played by *Zombieland*'s Abigail Breslin) is being taught by William to run barefoot through the wilderness in a cocktail dress and fight without relying on weapons. Veronica confesses her love for William, but his sole interest is in grooming her to infiltrate a gang of spoiled rich kids that has been systematically bringing young women to the woods in order to hunt them down and murder them. To please her mentor, Veronica successfully flirts her way into an invitation from the gang's "mastermind" Jameson (Alexander Ludwig: TV's *Vikings*) but, surprise surprise, this cat-and-mouse chase turns out to be much more than they bargained for.

Oy, where to begin? The script is full of

wince-worthy dialogue ("You Babylonian whore!") and Breslin lacks both the fitness and charisma to pull off her role. It's hinted that William's desire to take down these trust fund brats stems from the untimely deaths of his wife and daughter, but none of that fits with anything we know about this group. It's a shame, really — in the right hands, this story could have been a fun little teen horror movie that turned a classic trope on its head. Do like the cast is likely doing — forget this one ever happened.

ANDREW SCHULZ

## A SLITHERING CROC

### LAKE PLACID VS ANACONDA

Starring Corin Nemec, Yancy Butler and Robert Englund  
Directed by A.B. Stone  
Written by Berkeley Anderson  
Sony

When a movie with "vs" in the title turns out to be significantly dumber than your lowest expectation had allowed you to imagine, well, that's just really, really fucking sad. *Lake Placid Vs. Anaconda* is that movie and then some. And less.

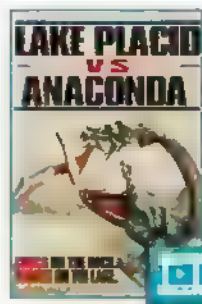
Apparently there's a gigantic mutant anaconda on the loose in the wilds of Maine and someone thinks it'd be a spiffing good wheeze to crossbreed it with a crocodile, the experiment goes awry, yadda, yadda, yadda. The tropes are all here: the game warden (Corin Nemec), the sheriff (Yancy Butler), her bumbling doofus deputy (some guy), evil military industrial types, a bunch of bitchy, vacuous sorority girls, several corresponding douchey frat boys, a misappropriated serum that causes the whole ruckus, and Robert Englund with an eye patch, several prosthetic limbs and a few dwindling shreds of dignity that are long gone by the halfway mark. Last year's solid *Fear Clinic* served notice that Englund can turn in a first-rate performance when he's not saddled with playing an uninspired cartoon character; this film drives home how rarely the former happens. The rest of the

admittedly decent cast are similarly squandered.

Given that *LPVA* is a painfully obvious (and half-hearted) cash grab, it's kind of astounding that the producers misjudged their own market so grievously. Films such as *Sharktopus*, *Sharknado* and their offspring have enjoyed significant success recently by fully embracing their own cheese factor, making their inherent flaws — specifically, ludicrous plotting and dreadful CGI effects — part of their appeal, while this one actually expects us to take it all in stride or maybe just look the other way. Irony fail!

The script is so witless and indifferently written that when it has a rare, genuinely, intentionally funny moment, it feels like gold. Same goes for the one cool death scene, which my innate aversion to spoilers prohibits me from describing here, although I can't stress enough that it does *not* make the rest of the viewing experience even remotely worthwhile. Similarly, there are eight boobs on display in the film, all of which are real (trust me) and attached to very attractive women, but none of them redeem *LPVA*. That's right. Not even the boobs. Not. Even.

JOHN W. BOWEN



## FAALIENS

### EXTRATERRESTRIAL

Starring Brittany Allen, Freddie Stroma and Melanie Papalia  
Written and directed by The Vicious Brothers  
Anchor Bay

The Vicious Brothers made a name for themselves with the ghosthunter found-footage movies *Grave Encounters* and *Grave Encounters 2*. This time around they've decided to take on the alien abduction subgenre with *Extraterrestrial*.

Set in a backwoods town, it follows a group of completely annoying, stereotypical, serial-killer-fodder kids who decide to spend the weekend at a cabin for some fun and frivolity. After witnessing a UFO crash into the nearby woods, they go to investigate, but faster than you can say "David Duchovny" the whole area is swarmed by aliens that start abducting them.

Sadly, the aliens aren't particularly scary — tall, skinny and naked, they look like the greys from *The X-Files*. Their only weapon is the ability to put thoughts in your head, which could make you kill yourself or other people.

Fast forward through a bunch of folks running around, some red lights and a cameo by a tired-looking Michael Ironside (*Scanners*, *Starship Troopers*) — it doesn't get interesting.





until it's nearly over and we finally get to see the interior of the alien ship. But even that's an uneven display of nightmarish trauma reminiscent of the examination scene in *Fire in the Sky*, but set against an unfortunate anal probe sequence that's more laughable than frightening.

Though the final scene does have a good twist, it's far too little too late to make up for the first 100 minutes that abduct the viewers' time

I don't know exactly where these guys went wrong — they appear to be competent directors with a firm grasp of the English language and the ability to edit good special effects into their narrative. If I had to guess, I'd say this is just another tired trope that didn't need to be resuscitated again — as this proved to be nothing more than a close encounter of the worst kind!

LAST CHANCE LANCE

## THE PIG-MEN COMETH

### THE BLOOD LANDS

Starring Pollyanna McIntosh, Lee Williams and Joanne Mitchell

Directed by Simeon Halligan

Written by Ian Fenton

Magnet

It's really hard to fuck up a home invasion movie — the concept of people invading our private spaces to harm us is so inherently terrifying. Yet *The Blood Lands* manages to squander that concept with a lack of tension and toothless scares.

The film begins with an eye-rolling "based on actual events" clause before opening on Sarah and Ed (McIntosh and Williams), a married couple leaving their busy lives in London behind for a secluded country home in Scotland. Ed, being a city boy, isn't warm to the idea of the vast countryside, but Sarah is absolutely infatuated with it, which convinces him

Then, one night, they are attacked by men in pig masks. They kidnap Ed, and Sarah must find a way to escape before she too becomes captured.

Where do I even begin? The characters? The ending? How about the pacing, which is horrible; it takes almost half the film's running time before the assailants show up — and when they finally do arrive, there's virtually no tension.

A major part of the problem is that the victims are not worth rooting for. Ed's a patriarchal douche and Sarah's a wimp who constantly whines to her husband to check on strange noises, or wakes him up to fetch candles from downstairs. She's redeemed somewhat when forced to fight back against the bad guys, but the previous 40 minutes of her insufferable personality makes it damn difficult to care.

I won't spoil the ending, but to say it's ridiculous is an understatement. I'm sure it derives from the film being a "true story" but it makes everything that came before meaningless, pointless and just nonsensical. Whatever you do, don't let *The Blood Lands* invade your movie library.

BRETT MCNEILL



## OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

### THIS ISSUE: LANCE LOVES HIS CRAFT

#### NOT-SO-GREAT OLD ONES



### THE FESTIVAL

Dark Vision Films

H.P. Lovecraft may be nothing more than a lantern-jawed freak to some people, but to others he's one of the most important horror writers of the early 20th century. Adapted from a short story that first appeared in a 1925 issue of *Weird Tales*, *The Festival* follows a guy who visits his wife's seaside hometown to help out with their annual festival, only to discover that he's there as a sacrifice meant to appease the Elder Gods. It's a cool premise that suffers from wooden acting, brutal editing and extremely sparse dialogue that at times appears to have been inserted only as an afterthought. This was one of the first Lovecraft tales to mention the *Necronomicon*, but not even that dreaded tome could resurrect this sucker.

BODY COUNT: 5

BEST DEATH: Guy killed with a toilet plunger

#### SHIFTY BEHAVIOUR



### THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP

MVD Visual

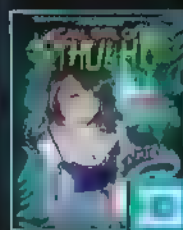
What should you do when your bestie falls in love with a woman devoted to the black arts? Well, you could either warn him or enjoy the show as they tear each other to pieces. That's the quandary facing the main character in *The Thing on the Doorstep* when he discovers his friend's new wife has been shifting into his body so she can go for joyrides in his meatsuit. Shot almost entirely in soft focus with a greenish yellow tint reminiscent of bile, it's as boring as it is dismal. Despite the great title, it's based on a 1933 Lovecraft novel that's generally regarded as one of the author's weakest works. I'm sure even old Howard Phillips

would have been disappointed in this one.

BODY COUNT: 5

BEST DEATH: Woman drowns in her car

#### LOVE IS A MANY-TENTACLED THING



### CALL GIRL OF CTHULHU

Camp Motion Pictures

Carter is a struggling artist who falls in love with a hooker. If that wasn't bad enough, she also happens to be the chosen mate for the ancient God Cthulhu, who's being summoned from another dimension by a group of cultists so she can bear him a child. Undaunted, Carter takes on the cultists in order to stop their tentacled deity from getting his slimy rocks off with the love of Carter's life. Loosely based on a short story from 1928, this cool flick is witty and packed to the gills with campy effects and lots of good, gory kills. Just remember to run the next time you're having sex with your girlfriend and she starts to chant *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn!*

BODY COUNT: 34

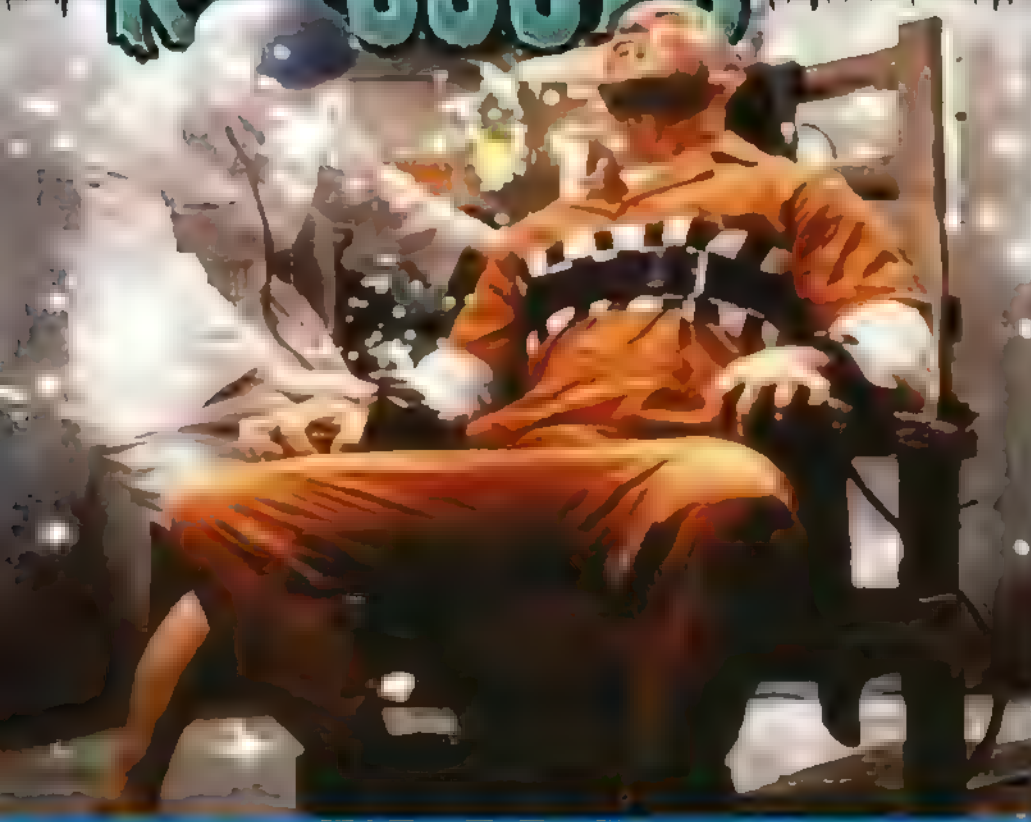
BEST DEATH: Prostitute killed with a dildo and electric fan

LAST CHANCE LANCE

UNRATED R M



## REISSUES



## MORE THAN MEETS THE FRY

## SHOCKER (1989) Blu-ray

Starring Peter Berg, Mitch Pileggi and Camille Cooper  
Written and directed by Wes Craven  
Scream Factory

"This whole film was an exorcism of my own demons with my father," proclaims Wes Craven in the commentary track for *Shocker*. On one hand, the 1989 film is a goofy, fun, rubber-reality slasher that sits in the shadow of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and doesn't age as well due to its dated special effects, bombastic heavy metal soundtrack and descent into slapstick. On the other hand, it's a pivotal work in the filmmaker's canon – the first project in which he had complete artistic freedom and took advantage of that to fully explore several of his thematic interests including the disconnection between generations and the intrinsic nature of violence.

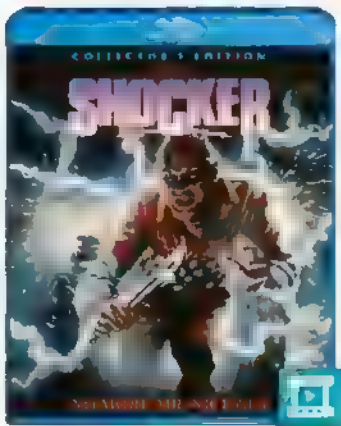
Peter Berg, who went on to direct Hollywood films such as *Very Bad Things* and *Friday Night Lights*, stars as Jonathan Parker, a high school

jock who, through his dreams, can enter the reality of brutal serial killer Horace Pinker (*The X-Files*' Mitch Pileggi). After Pinker targets his loved ones, including his girlfriend, Alison (Camille Cooper), he helps send him to the electric chair. However, through black magic, the killer becomes a body-jumping spirit who comes after him and eventually learns how to travel through television signals, forcing Jonathan to follow Marshall McLuhan would've loved it.

Designed to become a franchise like *Elm Street*, *Shocker* has its share of ambitious gore gags and comedic one-liners, courtesy of its own (partially) burned boogeyman. But the humour and horror don't mix as well here, and the effects are schlocky, especially in hi-def. Yet, it's a – pun intended – high-energy blast.

In his commentary, carried over from the DVD release, Craven offers plenty of insight into the movie's history, his own art and where he was in his personal life at the time (speculating that his divorce darkened the story).

Once again, Scream Factory super-charges its special edition, providing a new commentary



with director of photography Jaques Hartken, producer Robert Engeman and composer William Goetz, a new feature on the soundtrack that includes producer Desmond Child, former KISS member Bruce Kulik and Megadeth's Dave Ellefson; new interviews with Pileggi, Cooper and producer Shep Gordon, who gives some amazing insight into the difficulties of making films in Hollywood; and more.

Take it from a guy who dressed up as Horace Pinker for Halloween a few years ago, *Shocker* might not be *Videodrome*, but – as this release reveals – it's got more juice than you think.

DAVE ALEXANDER

## FLESH FOR FANTASY

## VIDEODROME (1983) Blu-ray

Starring James Woods, Deborah Harry and Leslie Carlson  
Written and directed by David Cronenberg  
Arrow Video

Important transmission: David Cronenberg's first masterpiece has been made available as a limited-edition Blu-ray by superb UK boutique label Arrow Video. You may own the Criterion special edition of 1983's *Videodrome* already, but this UK version is worth getting an all-region player for as it boasts its own wealth of extras, including four early experimental shorts/short features (*Transfer*, *From the Drain*, *Criminals of the Future* and *Stereo*) restored from original elements and spruced up with a 1080p HD transfer.

They are fascinating cultural artifacts that show us the director's thematic concerns and stylistic touches were there from the very beginning. More on the extras shortly...

James Woods stars in Cronenberg's surrealist body-horror classic as Max Renn, the smarmy proprietor and programmer of a small television studio chasing ratings by airing sensationalistic material. Stumbling across a mysterious signal that broadcasts

exceedingly violent S&M videos, Max is hooked and thinks he's on to a winner. Then his surreal nightmare begins...

One of the director's most adored and electrifying films, its freaky atmosphere and dream-like narrative – aided by Rick Baker's first-class effects work and Howard Shore's droning electronic score – is undiminished 32 years on. It also still feels frighteningly relevant – perhaps even prophetic – in the age of the Internet and what is referred to today as the "Dark Web."

Back to those extras: the Region B-only discs feature bonus material from previous releases, but the new 100-page booklet (featuring short essays by Brad Stevens, Tim Lucas, Justin Humphreys and Caelum Vatsndal), the





aforementioned quartet of short films, a newly recorded featurette presented by author and critic Kim Newman, and cover art designed by Gilles Vranckx (a guy with a name that sounds like a Cronenberg protagonist, no?) make for a vital re-release for Cronenberg completists. Of course, the major reason for UK folk to get excited about this Arrow Video edition is the presentation: an uncut version of the film for the first time ever. It's time to throw those inferior copies away with your old tube TV.

MARTYN CONTERIO

## A MASTERFUL MURDERPIECE

### ANGST (1983) Blu-ray

Starring Erwin Leder, Silvia Rabenreither and Edith Rosset

Directed by Gerald Kargl

Written by Zbigniew Rybczynski

Cult Epics

After serving time for attempting to kill his mother, Austrian Werner Knesek was given limited parole, and within a short period he killed an elderly woman and her disabled son, and raped and eventually killed her daughter. The case resonated within Austria, and Gerald Kargl sought to make his directorial debut with a taut thriller inspired by Knesek's evil doings, but the project ultimately proved to be a career killer, banned in Germany, barely released internationally and, according to the director in 2003, never earning back its cost.

Yet, *Angst* is a marvel of a movie, perhaps more notable now for seeding the first-person perspective in which the camera is tethered to the torso of the subject, forcing audiences to experience everything at arm's length, literally – something Gaspar Noé would adopt in *Enter the Void* (2009). But the film also ranks with some of the best true crime thrillers, including



*In Cold Blood* (1967) and *10 Rillington Place* (1971). Additionally, it predates *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986) in terms of the narrative being glued to a murderer and allowing the audience to feed off his despicable narcissism and sexual gratification.

Erwin Leder, fresh from *Das Boot* (1981), plays "The Psychopath," a creature that acts purely on instinct and lives in the moment, in spite of fancying himself an uber-killer. His idiocy is almost comedic, in that everything that's plotted so well in the mind of the would-be killer becomes a series of slips and rash decisions.

*Angst* isn't a comedy, though. The Psychopath may be absurd and ridiculous, but he's also terrifying, as he'll do anything to achieve his impossible fantasy. Kargl handles the horror and vio-



lence with aplomb, using stunning camerawork and montage, and a score by Klaus Schulze (of Tangerine Dream) that often goes against scene rhythms by slowing down tempo as the killer drags his victims room-to-room, trying to figure out the ultimate torment during a murder high.

Kargl's lone feature is an art film but it's accessible, I hear, and now uncut in a gorgeous HD transfer from Cult Epics, featuring new extras plus some material from the aborted Barrel Entertainment DVD.

MARK R. HASAN

## JAWSZILLA

### TENTACLES (1977) Blu-ray

Starring John Huston, Shelley Winters and Bo Hopkins

Directed by Ovidio G. Assonitis

Written by Steven W. Carabatsos, Tito Carpi,

Jerome Max, et al.

### REPTILICUS (1961)

Starring Carl Ottsen, Ann Smyrner and Mimi Heinrich

Directed by Sidney W. Pink

Written by Ib Melchior and Sidney W. Pink

Scream Factory

Scream Factory continues to restore delightful gruel from a bygone era, this time giving us a creature feature double bill of *Tentacles* and *Reptilicus*.

Given that it was released a year after *Jaws*, it's no surprise that the shadow of Steven Spielberg's film looms all over *Tentacles*, which may explain why an A-list cast (John Huston, Shelley Winters and Peter Fonda) signed on to make a movie about a giant octopus on a rampage. Here, an undersea digging operation awakens said cephalopod, coinciding with a big yacht race at a Southern California town. It's up to marine biologist (Bo Hopkins) and his two tamed orcas to save the day.

At times, director Ovidio G. Assonitis shows a deft hand with the camera, building some suspense for the early death of an infant, playing

with zoom lenses and freeze frames, and aping *Jaws*' water-level POV photography. But the characters are sketchy at best, making us root for the monster, which is awkwardly realized with close-ups of a real octopus and wide shots of a miniature.

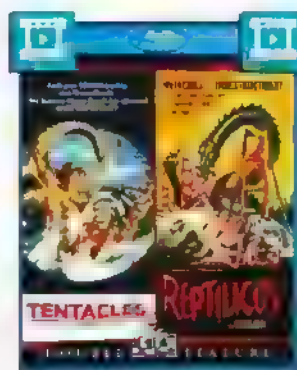
The scattershot vibe is echoed in Stelvio Cipriani's trippy score – sometimes sounding like dreamy orca calls, other times resembling bad '70s funk. By the end, you get the feeling that no one really knew what to do with this, other than give it an awesome poster.

*Reptilicus*, meanwhile, is a surprisingly well-crafted feature, even if it does try to be four movies at once: broad comedy, traditional monster movie, war film and even a musical travelogue(!) of Copenhagen, where it's set. Playing like a cross between *The Thing* and *Godzilla*, the plot sees a piece of *Reptilicus*' tail discovered in the permafrost, it thaws and transforms into a raging giant reptile (puppet). The expected mayhem ensues.

This is one of those movies where power is wielded by didactic (male) scientists and army officers, while the supporting cast is either eye candy (e.g. the head scientist's fetching daughters) or caricatures (Dirch Passer, who plays a bumbling janitor like he's in a Jerry Lewis movie). *Citizen Kane* it's not, yet we still want to cheer for these characters. Plus, there's something truly endearing about the monster when it's pitted against stock footage of tanks, guns, soldiers and even a warship churning out real depth-charges.

In both cases, Scream Factory's crisp transfers give these movies a real lift. *Tentacles*, in particular, fares well with its seaside colours and above-cover-age underwater photography, which bathe the picture in azure hues. It's almost enough to make you forget the giant terrors creeping across the globe to get you...

JEFF SZPIRGLAS



graphy, which bathe the picture in azure hues. It's almost enough to make you forget the giant terrors creeping across the globe to get you...



## CASUALTIES OF GORE

### TROMA'S WAR (1988) Blu-ray

Starring Carolyn Beauchamp, Sean Bowen and Rick Washburn  
Directed by Michael Herz and Lloyd Kaufman  
Written by Lloyd Kaufman and Mitchell Dana  
Troma

In life, there are a few certainties: the sun will rise tomorrow, your relatives will always ask why you didn't bring a date to family dinners and if Michael Herz and Lloyd Kaufman are attached to a movie, it is going to be balls-to-the-wall ridiculous. *Troma's War* is no exception, featuring more guts, blood and boobs than you can shake a stick at, with all the '80s seaze and cheese to make it a fun classic. Although Troma's output is very niche due to the library's exploitation-style ode to bad taste, for fans of twisted satire, there's more than enough to make this one worthwhile.

The movie features a cast of outrageous caricatures from Troma-ville, such as an outspoken judgmental "modern woman," a Vietnam vet on the verge of a mental breakdown, a sassy older woman with huge hair and impressive fighting skills, a fast-talkin' businessman and a hyper-masculine hero, to name several. The motley crew has crash-landed on an uncharted island, and almost immediately gets caught in the crossfire of a terrorist organization. The group members must band together to fight their ruthless enemies and maintain the freedom of not only Troma-ville, but the world.

*Troma's War* is rife with moments that will shock the laughs out of its viewers, such as a



conjoined twin villain being sliced in half by one of the main characters. Although it has an extremely thin plot - which aims to be as outlandish as possible in a nod to macho action movies (with an apparently record-breaking amount of squibs used) - its depth is in its satirical commentary of Ronald Reagan's glorification of war, which is mentioned by Kaufman and Herz in the special feature *War Memories*, in which Herz sarcastically calls him "the greatest president we've ever had." This movie is an anti-establishment masterpiece that's saturated in so much action it's hard not to enjoy, but if you're easily offended, it's perhaps best to stay away from anything that Kaufman and Herz have put their paws on.

RICHELLE CHARKOT

## BEASTS BEFORE BOND

### NOMADS (1986) Blu-ray

Starring Lesley-Anne Down, Pierce Brosnan and Frances Bay  
Written and directed by John McTiernan  
Scream Factory

John McTiernan was one of the most impressive directors of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Blessed with a keen sense of visual style and a deft hand at filming action sequences, he was the man behind *Predator* (1987), *Die Hard* (1988) and *The Hunt for Red October* (1990). Prior to those three box office blockbusters, he wrote and directed his first feature, the Los Angeles-set *Nomads*.

The film stars Pierce Brosnan as French sociologist Jean Pommier, whose move to LA to

teach at UCLA is interrupted when he encounters a group of punks who have left graffiti on the home he shares with his wife, Nik. (Anna-Maria Monticelli). Interestingly, the film begins at the very end of Pommier's life, the memories of which are transferred to Eileen Flax (Lesley-Anne Down), the physician with him at the time of his death. As the film progresses, Flax begins to viscerally relive Pommier's final days in her mind, soon realizing that the punks he encountered

are actually murderous demons bent on mischief and death, and that she may be next on their list.

Unfortunately, the acting attributes of a pre-James Bond Brosnan are not easily detected in *Nomads* because of the outrageous French accent he is forced to use throughout the film. At best it's distracting; at worst it's almost offensively awful.

What the film does have going for it is a taut, claustrophobic vibe - for all of its urban sprawl, throughout *Nomads*, Los Angeles feels small and inescapable, especially with the black-clad, maniacal title characters (including one played by new wave icon Adam Ant) seemingly lurking around every corner.

Adding to the claustrophobia is a stellar score by Oscar-winning composer Bill Conti, whose use of some incredibly aggressive distorted guitars is genuinely unique and unnerving.

The new transfer of the film is sadly a bit of a letdown, however *Nomads* shows its age, and doesn't feel as if it was significantly cleaned up for Blu-ray. Ultimately, it's a film that's more of a footnote in the rising careers of its star and director.

ANDY THORNTON



THE

# LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

FILE

*Seeing is Believing*

by Paul Corupe

**T**hough it's become something of a cliché in recent years, the point-of-view (POV) shot is one of the defining technical elements of horror cinema. From Hitchcock to slashers, and especially modern found-footage films, few genres are as adept at putting their audience right within the action as horror. Hitting theatres a few years before definitive killer POV sequences were used in *Black Christmas* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978), the sleazy Hollywood shocker *Blood and Lace* (1971) put viewers in the shoes of a hammer-wielding maniac in a memorable POV massacre that also functions as the key to its whodunit plot. Never officially released on home video in North America, the oft-overlooked film hits Blu-ray this month, courtesy of Shout! Factory.

As opposed to the similarly titled Mario Bava classic *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), director Philip Gilbert's sole effort behind the camera is far from stylish – the film feels like a '70s TV movie even as it delivers a steady stream of dismemberment, sadism and sexual taboos. After her mother is brutally killed, teenage Ellie (Melody Patterson) is sent to a dingy orphanage run by the stern Mrs. Deere (former film noir starlet Gloria Grahame). Deere has a good thing going with government money coming in – \$150 per kid – and any teens who dare an escape are either tied up and starved to death in the attic or dispatched by creepy handyman Tom (Len Lesser). Suffering from nightmares and struggling to get along with the other kids, Ellie soon discovers that Deere is so desperate for cash she keeps her dead victims in a basement meat freezer so they can be put back into action whenever a social worker (Milton Selzer) comes by to do a head count. But Ellie's got more to worry about: a mysterious masked figure is also creeping around the orphanage grounds, and she worries her mother's murderer has returned.

Though the film's commitment to depravity



keeps things moving, *Blood and Lace* doesn't ever top its opening POV sequence, in which Ellie's sex-worker mother and an unlucky john are killed with the claw end of a hammer. Gilbert's use of this technique follows previous approaches, intended largely to put the audience in the shoes of the killer and make viewers uncomfortably complicit in a forbidden act. The most notable early example is the opening tracking shot in

*The Cat and the Canary* (1927), in which the camera takes viewers down an atmospheric gothic hallway with billowing drapes towards a wall safe that is then broken into. Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), which features a killer with a blade mounted on a camera, takes this even further, showing us the camera's view as it kills, in order to raise questions about voyeurism.

If anything, the climax of *Blood and Lace*'s POV kill owes the most to the shower scene in *Psycho* (1960), even though it's a messier approximation – perhaps even a bit of a parody – of what Hitchcock accomplished, mixing POV with medium shots and close-ups in rapid succession. Playing out with a tense stock

score, this sequence begins as the camera enters a house and shows a hand rummaging in a drawer until it grasps a claw hammer. With the hammer apparently affixed to the camera and always on screen, viewers are taken up a flight of stairs and into a bedroom. While the view lingers over Ellie's mother in bed, the hammer ominously turns so the claw is pointed at her body, and the sleeping couple is then killed in a bewildering few seconds of POV shots, deadly weapon close-ups, and bloody, screaming faces. After the murders, the score gives way to upbeat xylophone muzak as we witness the bloody bodies, a macabre moment that's reminiscent of the lingering strings that play while the camera hovers around Marion's body on the shower floor in *Psycho*.

But there's something unique about this film's use of POV; it teases the audience with the real identity of the murderer in the way that this sequence is worked into the larger story. Taken by itself, the POV scene serves to obscure the identity of the killer, as it does in so many later slasher films, but *Blood and Lace* slyly tips its hand to attentive horror fans. And even if you have to wait until the final reel to have the culprit revealed, it's clear that *Blood and Lace* is an underrated little camp chiller – no matter how you look at it. ●





# IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

## Satan Screws the Pooch

by John W. Bowen

I'm not the type of person whose like or dislike of a film normally hinges on one sequence or image, but in the case of 1978's *Devil Dog, The Hound of Hell*, the semi-infamous lawnmower scene was pretty much all I remembered before revisiting it upon a recent midnight dreary. But let's save that for later.

Arriving the same year as *Halloween* and *Dawn of the Dead*, *Devil Dog* was seriously hobbled from the get-go. It was several years late to the great satanic cinema feast of the '70s, which had actually kicked off in '68 with *Rosemary's Baby* as an appetizer, climaxed a few years later with *The Exorcist* as the to-die-for main course and concluded with the gooey, bloating dessert that was *The Omen*; by 1978, Old Scratch was old hat. Also, this was a CBS made-for-TV movie – hence little gore, no nudity and decidedly sub-*Star Wars* special effects – and for the love of Lassie, it was about a devil dog. So what compelled me to take this mangy cur for another walk? Two words: lawnmower scene. But that comes later.

After a prologue in which a gaggle of hooded ne'er-do-wells, led by Hammer siren and two-time Bond girl Martine Beswick, gather in a barn, chanting in Latin to beg Satan's favour, we meet the Networksons – sorry, make that the Barry family – a clan of suburbanoids so wholesome you just know something strange and terrible has to happen to justify the next two hours. Betty (movie-of-the-week MILF Yvette Mimieux), Mike (equally ubiquitous Richard Crenna) and kids Charlie (like Eisenmann) and Bonnie (Kim Richards) are making preparations for Bonnie's tenth birthday party when the family dog gets pancaked in a hit-and-run. Bonnie calls off the event and everyone's in a funk until a suspiciously friendly roving produce vendor (R.G. Armstrong, speaking of ubiquitous) hawking fresh vegetables from the back of his truck (also suspicious, that) pays a call. And what-



dya know? He's also giving away adorable German shepherd puppies! (Hello? Also a tad weird, right?) But none of this sets off any alarm bells of cynicism or self-preservation in a bereaved ten-year-old girl, so the Barrys adopt the dog, name him Lucky and the plot lurches forward.

Things start going awry before the little bastard's even housebroken. The family's Mexican housekeeper is immediately suspicious of Lucky – after all, as an immigrant domestic labourer in a horror movie, it's in her DNA – and sure enough, she soon goes up in flames while lighting candles to pray for protection while wearing the World's Most Insanely Flammable Bathrobe (seriously, did she soak that thing in diesel fuel or what?). Fast forward a year and the neighbour's dog Prince turns up dead, followed shortly by said neighbour. Charlie becomes class president by nefarious means, Bonnie turns into a vindictive little bee-yotch and Betty? Well, Betty gets her vamp on, donning semi-stinky outfits, then doffing them to go skinny dipping and (horrors!) initiating sex with her husband rather than waiting for him to start things in the accustomed fashion. A guidance counsellor exposes Charlie's shenan-

igans, but buys it when Lucky pays a late-night visit and chases him out into traffic. Only Mike, our pure-hearted patriarch, remains unbedeviled, unless you count the fact that he keeps promising to take the family out to dinner and never does. Realizing there's only one reasonable course of action, Mike jets off to Ecuador to consult a shaman, 'cause some problems can only be solved by mystics with funny accents. But not before the lawnmower incident (as promised).

In the film's one truly tense sequence, Mike's fixing the machine when he locks eyes with Lucky, who psychically forces our panicking protagonist's hand ever closer to the whirling blade. It's a genuinely harrowing moment, sold to us almost exclusively by Crenna's grimacing, muscle-tearing performance; it was the one sequence that remained vivid to me since watching it in my teens.

Apropos of absolutely fuck-all, *Devil Dog* marks the third of four times Richards and Eisenman would play siblings on film, the other three being Disney's popular *Witch Mountain* movies. Hey, wait a minute. She's Bonnie, he's Charlie, and the neighbour's dog's name is Prince? *Bonnie Prince Charlie*?! Like, *hello*, we weren't supposed to notice that pointless nod to British royalty in the 1700s? Wait, I think I may have just veered off topic a little. Well, no matter, I'm out of space now anyway, so clean up after your mutt and get the hell out of my basement. 🐾







**NEW**  
Skatonic &  
Cthulhu  
Work Shirts

**SIGHCO.COM**  
DANGEROUS FASHION FOR BOYS & GIRLS

The advertisement features two women on the sides wearing t-shirts. The woman on the left wears a black t-shirt with a green and red 'CTHULHU MASSINER' graphic. The woman on the right wears a black t-shirt with a red and white 'OPEN GRAVE BOLD BARN WHISKEY 18' graphic. In the center, two more t-shirts are displayed: one with a complex black and white skull and crown design, and another with a red and black graphic of a person's face.



*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*  
**RUE MORCUE**  
On Instagram

**@rueorguemag**

The advertisement features a large, stylized Instagram post on the left with a white background, a black camera lens, and green and purple liquid dripping from the top. A small 'Insta' logo is on the post. To the right is a collage of magazine covers. One cover prominently displays 'RUE MORCUE 13 SA' and 'HIDDEN HORROR'. Other covers show various horror-themed images and text like 'LOME' and 'NORTH'.



# BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Lovecraftian sci-fi, body-swapping, goblin violence and antique fortune tellers — *The Gates of Misery* is an exciting new horror anthology created by artist Matthew Therrien that brings together some of the industry's top talent, many of whom have never written for comics before. An ardent and lifelong fan of the genre, Therrien's ultimate goal for the project was simple: to keep the anthology format alive for a new generation of horror and comics fans while simultaneously pushing the writers to explore the dark depths of their creativity.

"The overall idea was to allow filmmakers and writers the opportunity to create a six-page or less horror story, no restrictions," says Therrien. "Whatever they could conjure from the depths of their nightmarish imaginations, I would draw. And I was absolutely delighted by what emerged."

Summoned by Therrien's siren call were filmmakers Steven Kostanski (*Manborg*), Brandon Cronenberg (*Antiviral*), Jon Knautz (*Jack Brooks: Monsterslayer*) and *Rue Morgue*'s own editor-in-chief, Dave Alexander. Each contributed a wildly different tale that together explore the many facets of horror.

Kostanski's "Re-Phase Malfuction" is a gruesome homage to Lovecraftian science-fiction; Cronenberg's "Death in Li Tolqa" is a disturbing, thought-provoking story about capital punishment and body-swapping; Knautz's "Darrel and Lenny" is about a social misfit and his maybe-imaginary yet highly violent goblin pal; while Alexander's "Cowboy Underground" is a nice callback to tales featuring antique fortune teller machines.

"The great advantage to having such imaginative and experienced creators writing stories is that the final product became this wonderful collection of utterly unique tales of terror," explains Therrien. "These aren't the types of stories you'd expect to find in a comic. They range from the subtle to the grandiose from the horror of human emotion and madness

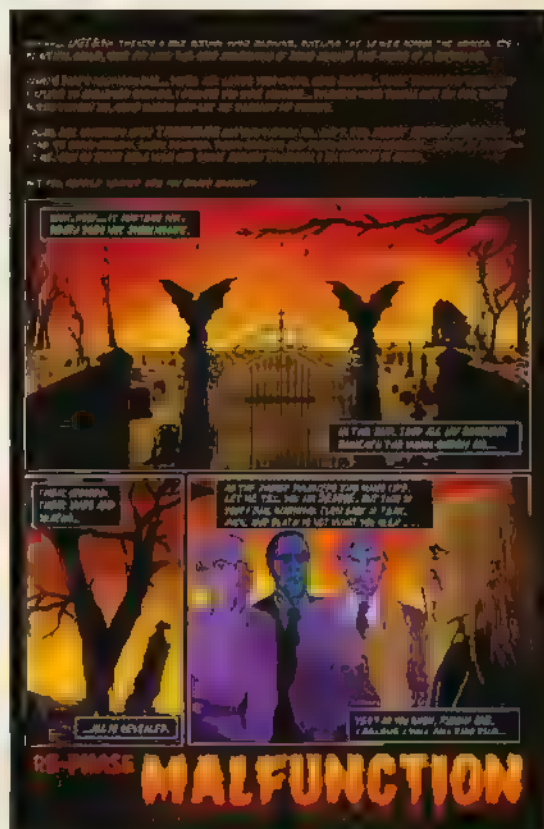
to the terror of massive monsters and other worlds. There's an extraordinary amount of variety to be found."

Like most horror anthologies, there is a connecting thread to the stories. In this case it's the Mount Misery Cemetery. Whenever anyone is buried in its grounds, the cemetery learns the corpse's entire life story and is all too eager to recount the person's death to anyone willing and able to listen. It's a compelling conceit that automatically differentiates the book from others with more traditional narrators.

Also adding to *The Gates of Misery*'s uniqueness is Therrien's decision to illustrate all but one of the tales ("Darrel and Lenny" is drawn by Andrew Barr). While logistically convenient, this led to its own set of challenges.

"It was extremely important to me to approach each segment in a completely different style that best reflected both the tone of the story itself, as well as the filmmaker who was writing it," says Therrien. "Cronenberg's 'Death in Li Tolqa' is by far the story that's closest to my natural drawing style, so it was fun and challenging to try to do something different with the other tales. As an illustrator who grew up with *Tales From the Crypt* comics, it's always great whenever I have a chance to emulate that old-school style of art, and Dave Alexander's short provided me with the perfect opportunity to do just that. But overall, I feel it's extremely important [in an anthology] that the artwork is as varied and visually different as possible."

Therrien's desire to further vary the look of the book resulted in artist Shira Haberman handling the inter-story segments set in the cemetery. It's a good way of maintaining some visual consistency while still offering diversity among the stories themselves. This focus on variety in both storytelling and art is something Therrien intends to keep in subse-



A page from Steven Kostanski's "Re-Phase Malfuction."

quent *Gates of Misery* releases, albeit with some slight changes in the format.

"The plan going forward is to release individual stories every month, as opposed to full issues," he explains. "These will be made available for digital purchase on our website, and ensures that fans of the comic across the world can access new stories without having to wait for us to physically print them, or pay extra for shipping overseas. I've already discussed future stories with some incredibly talented writers, and although I can't drop names quite yet, I assure you: horror fans should be excited. *The Gates of Misery* is far from over!"

Get *The Gates of Misery* and keep up to date with future installments by visiting [thegatesofmisery.com](http://thegatesofmisery.com).

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO



# QUICK CUTS

## THIS MONTH: MANY TALES TO TELL YOU

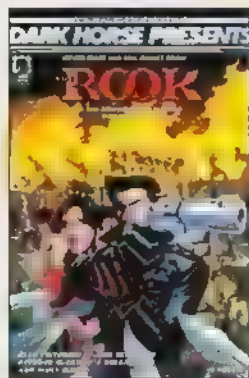
To celebrate *Vampirella's* 45th anniversary, Nancy A. Collins assembled some of the top writers and artists in the industry -- including Steve Niles, Stephen Bissette, Gail Simone and Joe R. Lansdale -- for *Vampirella: Feary Tales*. This five-issue miniseries (now collected in one volume) sees the scantily-clad vamp sucked into a magic book where she lives out twisted versions of familiar fairy tales. Several classics are name-checked, including "Little Red Riding Hood", "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty", but luckily only the most basic of frameworks are used. Instead, the writers alter the stories' content to adapt it to Vampirella's world, not vice-versa. So, for example, "The Three Bears" becomes a tale about Vampirella seeking help from three hick gas station attendants who transform into werebears under a full moon. It makes the whole enterprise far more interesting and successful. Add some interesting developments in the overall *Vampirella* mythos, and you have a must-read book for all fans.



Everyone's favourite skin-bound, talking book is back in *Evil Dead 2: Tales of the Ex-Mortis*, a collection of four stories that expand the films' mythology. None of the tales tie directly in to any of the movies, but they certainly evoke some of the more memorable aspects: killer trees, dismemberment, time travel and senior Deadites are all on display, complete with that patented twisted sense of humour. This works best in "Deadite Man Walking," in which a wheelchair-bound man uses the power of the Ex-Mortis to regain the use of his legs. Unfortunately,

the legs take on a deadly life of their own, recalling Ash's struggles with his possessed hand. It's a fine line between reminiscing with your readers and boring them with oft-told anecdotes, but the book manages to squeeze in just enough new elements to make it worth a look. It's a diverting dip into familiar waters: satisfying in the short-term, but it's doubtful you'll want to wade in too often.

One of the things I find most appealing about the anthology format is that it usually allows new (or lesser-known) talent an opportunity to flex their creative muscles. This is especially true in *Monstrosity Volume 2*, a book of



25 stories predominantly written and drawn by indie creators. There are monsters galore within these pages, including aliens, giant robots, ghosts and serial killers, so there's no shortage of mayhem. The tales themselves vary from straight thrillers to all-out comedies, but they each have a unique voice, and even the ones that are less successful make for interesting and thought-provoking reading. If there's one complaint, it's the book's smaller, manga-sized format, which sometimes lessens the impact of the art and makes some details difficult to discern. *Monstrosity Volume 2* may play better in a digital format where you can zoom in on panels.

**Dark Horse Presents** continues to serve as both a testing ground and preview of upcoming projects from the publisher. Though not all stories in a given issue are horror-related, it's a safe bet you'll stumble onto one or two. Surprisingly, the latest issue's six installments all have some connection to the genre. "The Rook" reintroduces Restin Dane, the time-traveling, gun-slinging monster hunter first seen in the pages of *Eerie Magazine* back in 1977 (and now handed by comic masters Steven Grant and Paul Gulacy); "Grimm Arcane" sees the famous brothers fighting a monstrous Pinocchio; while "Kill All Monsters," "Dream Gang" and "Kyrra: Alien



Jungle Girl" all feature non-human, deadly antagonists. The grisliest honours go to "Semiautomatic: Throne of Blood" by Alex de Campi and Jerry Ordway, a bug-infested tale that shows the veteran superhero artist is more than capable of creating disturbing and horrific imagery.

For fans of classic horror, *Haunted Horror* continues to collect some of the lesser-known works from the 1950s and is easily one of the best values on the market. This issue compiles another eight Golden Age stories and really drives home the diversity and experimental nature of the decade. There are certainly familiar elements on display for anyone who has read any stories from the '50s -- giant monsters, haunted houses, zombies and murder most foul are staples of the era. But there were also plenty of bizarre offerings among the more popular ones. "Time to Die" sees an abused orphan boy longing to be reunited with his dead father even if it means his own death. And "The Perfect Hideout" has a gangster open a gateway into the fourth dimension, with hellish consequences. They're nice reminders that there was plenty of envelope-pushing happening in the industry before the Comics Code hammer fell.





## CTHULHU FHTAGN!

Ross E. Lockhart, ed.  
Word Horde

Veteran editor Ross E. Lockhart goes back to his Lovecraftian roots (see *The Book of Cthulhu II* in RM#129) with an all-new, invitation-only selection of the latest Lovecraftiana. This particular field has been mined for decades, and while there's still some juice to be squeezed from it, how fresh it seems will mostly depend on readers' previous exposure. If you already know that the book's title means "Cthulhu sleeps," you'll probably be able to sleep just fine after reading it.

There is relatively little cosmic horror here; however, if you're happy with the down-to-earth psychology of troubled relationships, or at least action scenes and explicit body horror,

there's plenty to satisfy! Vikings battle the Deep Ones off the shore of what will become Innsmouth ("Aerkheim's Horror" by Christine Morgan); family abuse ends with prolonged creature splatter (Anya Martin's "The Prince of Lyghes"); a loveless marriage

culminates with gruesome transformations on a Polynesian island ("Return of the Prodigy" by T. E. Grau); and man-plant creatures in the jungle battle eco-friendly types (Cody Goodfellow's "Green Revolution").

Top of the bunch, however, are the three alternative history tales. "Lurker in the Shadows," by Nathan Carson, sees HPL, famous and influential (thanks to Lord Dunsany), corresponding with a young Stephen King, leading to some sinister swappings. "The Curse of the Old Ones" by Molly Tanzer and Jesse Bullington shows Peter Cushing, Ingrid Pitt and Vincent Price discovering dark intentions behind Hammer's production of *Call of the Deep Ones* (with a clever, funny-because-it's-true conclusion). And G.D. Falksen's "The Curious Death of Sir Arthur Turnbridge" offers a pleasing pastiche about a great Flemish detective whose investigation of a jade amulet and a murder at an English country es-

tate leads to ghoulish revelations.

Finally, Laird Barron's novelette "Don't Make Me Assume My Ultimate Form" mixes occult spy-girl ninjas, Alaska, a talking Poe-doll and the servants of "The Eater of Dolls" who are looking for it. This fragmentary tale of women who drink and fight like men against a vaguely defined entity is suggestive and frustrating in equal measure. It certainly ends the book on a high note – and leaves you craving more.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIC

## THE RISE, FALL, AND RISE OF THE CTHULHU MYTHOS

S.T. Joshi  
Hippocampus Press

Fans of the Great Old Ones rejoice: the numerous writings inspired by H.P. Lovecraft in the past ten years have caused his most devoted scholar to update his *The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos* so as to address the recent resurgence of the author's work.

The new version of the 2008 book starts with defining key concepts of "the Lovecraft Mythos": 1) a fictional New England topography, 2) a growing library of imaginary "forbidden" books, 3) a diverse array of extraterrestrial "gods" or entities, and 4) a sense of cosmicism. Their origin and development are depicted with Joshi's usual expertise before he goes on to deconstruct "the Derleth Mythos" (i.e. the cheapening of Lovecraft's ideas into a simplified, Christianized Good vs. Evil scenario). The major works by Lovecraft's contemporaries (Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch) and later descendants (Colin Wilson, Ramsey Campbell) are minutely analyzed and then, after details of the scholarly revolution of the early 1980s (which Joshi pioneered), the book comes to its most intriguing part – analysis of Lovecraftian stories and novels of the past twenty years. This is where Joshi deals with authors such as Thomas Ligotti, W.B. Spencer, Laird Barron and Caitlín R. Kiernan, and specific tribute anthologies, judging the best achievements from the standpoint of aesthetic

accomplishment, not faithfulness to a presumed Lovecraftian dogma.

In his criticism, Joshi does not mince words, but his mostly objective stance occasionally lapses into unpleasant attacks (as in his vitriolic response to John D. Haefele's book on Derleth) or into questionable assessments (heaping immoderate praise on the stories of his friend and webmaster, W.H. Pugmire). Still, for the most part, this is a thorough study that encapsulates not only the essence of what made Lovecraft's prose so lasting and influential, but also provides a laudable overview of the most vital works of his successors, and as such, it is not to be missed.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIC

## RECOVERING 1940s HORROR CINEMA: TRACES OF A LOST DECADE

Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, Charlie Elbe,  
Christopher Woofers, eds.  
Lexington Press

Every horror fan has an era that resonates strongly with him or her. For some, it's the brilliant Universal Films run of the 1930s; others may swear by the 1970s, when *The Exorcist*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween* and *The Omen* were shocking cinemagoers across North America. And make no mistake, though some may scoff at the slasher film legacy of the 1980s, that decade left its own indelible mark, thanks to franchise films such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th*.

Whether through critical acclaim or via the embrace of a large mainstream audience (and in some cases, both), these various eras of horror filmmaking are oft discussed, both academically and in pop culture. The same can't be said for the horror films of the 1940s. Coming on the heels of Universal's dominance of the genre, and with its releases appearing during and just after World War II amidst worldwide tension, the various genre films of the era have simply been lost to the ages.

That is, until the recent release of *Recovering 1940s*







Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Ivor Novello in *The Lodger*.

**Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade**, from Lexington Books. This scholarly text seeks to re-evaluate the era, putting its contributions to horror in a brand new light in which the 1940s stands as equally important to the genre's more well-known and revered decades.



Various authors including Mark Jancovich, Kiera Janisse and *Rue Morgue's* Paul Corupe contribute thoughtful essays on '40s horror, from its place in world cinema at the time, to how films, including 1944's *The Lodger* and *Bluebeard*, are the topical godparents of 1960s would-be slashers such as *Psycho*.

*Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema* is serious academic reading, which is both to its success and detriment. If you're a horror fan looking for an easy, engaging or accessible look at this particular time period, this book isn't it. It's simply too dense to make for a fun read. However, aspiring filmmakers and film scholars alike will no doubt find much to digest and ponder, and it will likely be cited in more than a few term papers by future Wes Cravens or John Carpenters.

ANDY BURNS

## BROTHER

Ania Ahlborn  
Gallery Books

The promise of violence comes in early in Ania Ahlborn's latest horror novel, *Brother*. Michael Morrow is trying to sleep while his brother Rebel is delighting in the slow, torturous demise of his latest victim. By the next morning, the young woman is dead and Michael's work begins. He's reluctantly on dismemberment duty and does not want to let his family down.

As the title suggests, *Brother* is all about family. The Morrows are an isolated, tight-knit clan of murderers. Living off the grid in rural West Virginia, they are the epitome of the nastiest people the Appalachians can give us. Rebel is the worst of them, but everyone in the family either assists or benefits from the blood that flows on their family land. Ahlborn dives into the Morrows' past and the evolution of Rebel's homicidal ways by balancing current drama with lengthy flashbacks.

# GRIM READER



## THE DEAD HOUSE

Dawn Kurtz

Little Brown and Company

Sisters Carly (a child of light) and Kaitlyn (a child of darkness) are like two souls trapped in one body. When Carly goes missing, Kaitlyn is willing to do anything in her power to find her, even if that means step-

ping into the world of the paranormal. *The Dead House* tells its powerful tale through diary entries, police reports and investigative interviews, and it will keep you in suspense right through to the final pages.

AMY BRIDGES



## EIGHT LITTLE ZOMBIES

John LaTour and David Metzger

Crooked Tombstone Productions

Unless you've been residing under a tombstone, you're probably familiar with the nursery rhyme "Eight

Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed." *Eight Little Zombies* scoops the concept and rhyming scheme to tell a tale of eight little rollers crawling from the grave (only to later be beheaded). Cartoonish and colourful, this undead take on a childhood classic will amuse horror-lovin' youngsters and grown-ups alike.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



## AT DEATH'S DOOR: A PICTURE BOOK HORROR MASH-UP

Jonathan Maberry

TOB

In the world of genre mash-ups, nothing beats cowboys and zombies. Based on the popular role-playing game *Deadlands*, this novel inhabits an American West that's not with both horror and

steampunk flavour. *Ghostwalkers* follows Grey Torrance, a gunslinger with a literal haunted past, who must wage battle against undead cowboys, vampire harlots and even a mad scientist. The action is great, but the dense descriptions can get a bit long in the tooth.

BRENTON BENTZ



## AT DEATH'S DOOR: A PICTURE BOOK HORROR MASH-UP

Ben Joel Price

Skyhorse Publishing

This small hardcover – illustrated with fun, slightly demented black, grey and orange images and lots of white space – claims it's "for grown-ups." But, really, it's per-

fect for anyone who enjoyed Tim Burton's *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*, as *At Death's Door* counts down to sinister creatures – all via rhyming poems and the occasional movie homage (a fly named Brundle Corp, anyone?).

MONICA S. KUEBLER



GEMMA FILES' EXPERIMENTAL FILM IS FULL OF GHOSTS  
AND HAUNTED BY HER OWN HISTORY

# AN IMITATION OF

# Life

ALISON LAAC



## IN GEMMA FILES' WORLD, ALL FILMS ARE FULL OF GHOSTS.

"Once a film ages past a certain point, everyone who was involved in its making is dead," says the Toronto-based author. "I'm really drawn to the idea that when you film something, or someone, you capture a part of its personality, its soul."

Files is well-acquainted with both the history of cinema and otherworldly beings: she taught the history of film at the Toronto Film School for over a decade, and she also worked for years as a film writer for the now-defunct Toronto newspaper *EYE Weekly*. These days, she's best known as an award-winning writer of horror and speculative fiction, including her popular *Hexslinger* trilogy — which features magic, Wild West gore and an unabashedly queer male gunslinger — and her Shirley Jackson Award-nominated 2010 novella *each thing I show you is a piece of my death*. The latter story helped plant the seeds for her first standalone horror novel, *Experimental Film* (out this month from ChiZine Publications).

Set in modern-day Toronto, the book follows Lois Cairns, a woman in a state of crisis. Cairns recently lost her job as an instructor at the Toronto Film Faculty and is patching together dwindling work as a film reviewer. Her son has autism and is a constant source of anxiety. In short, she's the type of protagonist that admits to us, early in the narrative: "I was born fucked up."

Cairns' luck is poised to change when she stumbles across a mysterious film clip buried in an experimental film program. It appears to date back to the 1920s and features a striking woman in a blindingly white veil wielding what appears to be a sword. The clip triggers something in Cairns, so she traces it back to its maker, Mrs. A. Macallia Whitcomb, a long-disappeared socialite (and Canada's first female filmmaker), and a mythological figure called Lady Midday, a generous but vengeful harvest deity that guards farmers' crops. As Cairns probes deeper into Whitcomb's history, her thirst to unearth an undiscovered piece of film

history (and make her own name in the process) comes at the cost of Lady Midday's increasingly ominous influence.

If Cairns' storyline sounds a little familiar, it should — Files says she made the deliberate decision to base Cairns' story on her own biography, with a few deviations.

"Lois is me the way I am at 3 a.m. — on a bad day. Much like Lixie, I lost my job, and the place I taught at closed, and then my son was diagnosed [with autism] and I became very depressed — for a year. But with Lois, I cut out the part where I had something else to fall back on, namely writing fiction."

*Experimental Film* reads like a hyper-smart version of *The Ring* with a heavy dose of European folklore, ancient gods and CanCon film history.

The novel's horror is underscored by the ghoulish, unfolding histories of Lady Midday and Mrs. Whitcomb, but it's also propelled by notions of ambition, obsession and self-destruction — how far will we go to make a name for ourselves? For Cairns, it comes down to her inexhaustible search for the story behind the celluloid, blinding her to Lady Midday's ever-encroaching influence on her dreams, her family and her mental and physical well-being. Files likens Cairns to Helen Lyle, the determined folklore scholar in the 1992 horror film *Candyman*, whose obsession with the film's murderous title character unwittingly leads her down a doomed path.

Indeed, there are points in the book where Cairns feels caustic and almost unpleasant in her unwavering ambition. For Files, it was crucial to make the character sympathetic —

but not necessarily likeable. It's this commitment to realistic characters that makes *Experimental Film* a breathlessly devourable novel.

"It's something you come up against a lot as a female writer, this idea that women have to be likeable," she says. "One of the reasons I'm obsessed with male villains is that they get to be sympathetic but also repellant — The Governor in *The Walking Dead*, for example. I want more female characters like that."







We learn that the Morrrows' malice and complacency are fuelled by evil and greed, and the book spends much of its pages familiarizing us with them (to an intimate and uncomfortable degree). From Michael's butchering to Mama's Iron-fisted rule, they're all monstrous in their own way. But, unfortunately, while the character examinations are fascinating, *Brother* never quite lives up to the darkness of its opening.

The lack of blood for most of the pages feels like the first chapter was a bit of a tease. Instead of maintaining or even revisiting the initial excitement, the book takes its sweet time getting to the next killing. When it finally happens, the inevitable gore is a nice bookend to the violence early in the novel, but what could be a murderous climax plays out more like a distracting interruption to the family drama.

This lack of action makes *Brother* a slightly plodding if otherwise consistent read. Climbing inside the minds of a band of serial killers could have been more terrifying, but there is still some value in the novel's dedication to investigating character

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

## ORPHANS

Roy C. Booth and Axel Kohagen  
Dark Fantasy Press

An orphan is defined as a child without parents. In fiction, this role could be assigned to any number of persons involved in a project, from the authors to the editors and even the publisher. It's regrettable that Roy C. Booth and Axel Kohagen's *Orphans* is so aptly named – an ironic indicator that the writing duo was abandoned by any nurturing editors or beta readers during the path to publication.

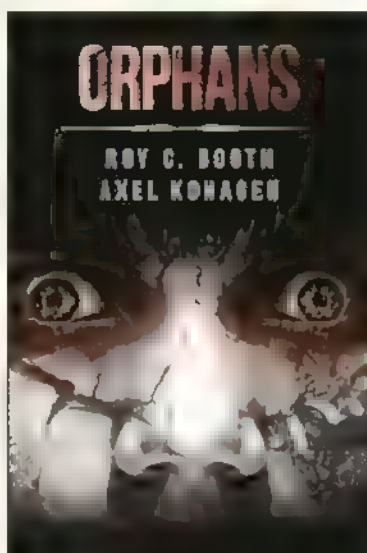
In short, *Orphans* is a poorly written, jumbled mess, wherein a confusing narrative surrounds the investigation of a series of murders in a small town ripe with stereotypical, uninspired characters. The novel's scares come less from its depictions of violence, and more from the realization that a publisher approved and printed it.

The main problem, the presentation of the narrative, is most easily demonstrated in the technique used for the chapters. Taking place over a bizarre week in the life of a small town, each chapter is prefaced by the date, location and names of the players in the scene. As a result, *Orphans* ends up resembling a movie script that was hodge-podged into a novella. Booth and Kohagen place too much trust in the assumptions of their audience in regards to the characters, who are brushed over with barely enough background to give them life, in turn preventing readers from bonding with any of them. Additionally, the prose is often too short and clunky, providing only cursory information that's easily forgotten.

Ultimately, there's nothing memorable about *Orphans*; not the protagonists, the antagonists or even the settings. Everything seems to be pulled from the fiction stereotype pool. The outsider kid in trouble with the law, the kid's creepy mentor, the cops making wrong assumptions, and the revenge seeking father? They're all here. A small town where everyone knows everyone and has secrets? You've got it. Illogical story twists? Of course they're present, every story today needs a twist! And we can't forget the evil clown! After all, you can't tell a scary story without a clown, right?

*Orphans* won't make you run to the literary adoption agency, which is somewhat surprising given the duo's pedigree, but they can't all be hits. Hopefully their next partnership will produce a better story.

TOM CLARK



# LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

A PAIR OF PODCASTS

In the last eleven months, two teams of authors have launched genre-themed podcasts. This month, I tune into both and take stock.

## The Horror Show

[thehorrorshowwithbriankeene.com](http://thehorrorshowwithbriankeene.com)

Launched in January 2015, *The Horror Show* is hosted by Brian Keene (*The Rising*) with co-host Dave "Meteornotes" Thomas ([meteornotes.com](http://meteornotes.com)) and occasional co-host Geoff Cooper (*Retribution, Inc.*). Irreverent and full of bluster and passion, episodes are posted every Thursday and are 60- to 90-minutes long. A typical show features a look at what's currently happening in the world of horror, reviews of books (and other media), and an in-person interview with an author, such as Edward Lee, Linda Addison, F. Paul Wilson and Thomas Monteleone. The podcast occasionally breaks format for special episodes, including memorial tributes and "secret origins" installments, in which Keene goes into the creative process behind his most popular novels. *The Horror Show* is most memorable for Keene and company's accounts of their online and offline shenanigans and their habit of discussing various scandals (including authors' feuds with publishers/Amazon, etc.), making it one of the rare shows to pull back the curtain on the genre publishing industry – for better or worse. You probably don't want to tune in around the kiddies, but if you find more standard-issue book podcasts boring, *The Horror Show* is for you.

## Three Guys With Beards

[projectradio.com/shows/three-guys-with-beards](http://projectradio.com/shows/three-guys-with-beards)

Launched in May 2015, *Three Guys With Beards* is hosted by Christopher Golden (*Snowblind*), Jonathan Maberry (*Patient Zero*, *Rot & Ruin*) and James A. Moore (*Blood Red*). Episodes are a little over an hour long and are released every week or two. Each installment kicks off with a song, followed by an assortment of pop culture and literary news (stuff that's caught the hosts' attention), a what-are-you-reading segment (in which they discuss stories they're currently enjoying) and an interview with a writer (guests have included Tim Lebbon, Charlene Harris, Cherie Priest and Paul Tremblay), before closing with plugs for current projects. *Three Guys* is particularly cool because the interviewee joins the hosts for the entire show, almost acting as a guest host for that episode. Tonally, this is more sedate than *The Horror Show* – closer to traditional talk radio. The hosts do crack jokes (guys with beards!), and even take some playful stabs at Keene's podcast, but for the most part the discussions are less heated and involve considerably less swearing. This one's perfect to begin your day with, grab a coffee and enjoy a congenial conversation about not-so-congenial books (and comics and movies).



# FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY LYN FOLEY

THIS MONTH: **THE DOOM THAT CAME TO FRIGHT GALLERY**

**H**elp! Skinner has taken over my column! Of course, he's a good fit for this issue, as H.P. Lovecraft's hellish universe of gods and unnameable beings has permeated so much of his art (*RM* #153), from famous wall murals in Oakland, California, to his album and video art for the rock band Mastodon. The self-taught artist perfectly sums it up when asked, where do you begin to imagine the world of Lovecraft?

"This is a great question because I think that people like things spelled out for them. Literally explained in every detail. To be relieved from having to imagine anything, lest they be challenged to stare into the potential for creating their own horror."

His recent painting *Azathoth Invoked* debuted at the Necronomica 2015 art show in Providence and it aptly captures Lovecraft's hideous, tentacle deity in all its madness.

"To me, Lovecraft created a crescendo of terror and built a deliberate case around every scenario. I see the 'indescribable' as a challenge. In a way," he says of the work. "How unorthodox and expansive of a mental image can you create in your mind?"

After consulting with the Great Old Ones, Skinner hand-picks his top three contemporary Lovecraft-inspired artists.

**Nick Gucker (nickthehat.com)**

"[He's] been blasting out creepy visions and startling graphic interpretations of horrible lurking things. His momentum for this is incredible. This illustration, Shub-Niggurath [a God in the Cthulhu mythos, from "The Last Test," co-written with Adolphe de Castro], seemed timeless in its bulbous freak energy!"

**Michael Bukowski (lastchanceillustration.com)**

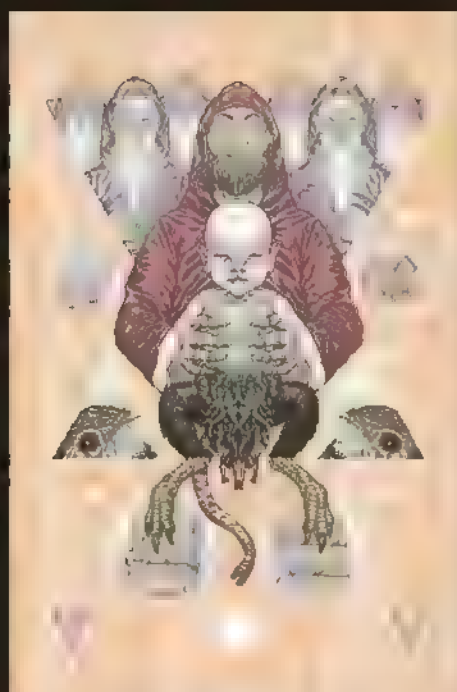
"A sort of keeper of monstrous vision, Michael



has been blowing me away with his encyclopaedic and astute recording of all monsters and deities that have been referenced in any weird tale. His depiction of Wilbur Whateley [a character in *The Dunwich Horror*] as a child was perfect! And grotesque!"

**Liv Rainey-Smith (xylographia.com)**

"She's a woodblock carver of the highest order. I fell in love with her loyalty to tradition and her outstanding skill. Her compendium of creepy visions are classic. Her Tsathogua [a toad-like Old One from "The Whisperer in Darkness"] piece blew my doors off as soon as I saw it!"



**Grim Visions:** (clockwise from top left) Skinner's *Azathoth Invoked*, Michael Bukowski's *Wilburwhateley*, Liv Rainey Smith's *Tsathogua*, and Nick Gucker's *Shub-Niggurath*.



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# THE GORE MET

MENU: FEEDING THE BEASTS



After redefining the modern horror film in 1974 with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Tobe Hooper needed work. In 1976 independent producer Mardi Rustam approached him about filming a script he had co-written. Hooper and *Chainsaw* scribe Kim Henkel reworked it and *Eaten Alive* (1976) lurched to life.

The story is loosely based on the crimes of Joe Ball, the "Bluebeard" of Texas, a serial killer who reputedly fed women to the alligators in the custom-built pit behind his bar (there was no evidence he disposed of his victims this way). The film's plot, such as it is, concerns the deranged owner (Neville Brand) of a rundown hotel in a Texas swamp who occasionally feeds guests to the "Nile crocodile" he keeps in a pit beside the building. After he feeds the animal a prostitute who comes to stay after being kicked out of a local brothel for refusing to have anal sex with a rowdy redneck (Robert Englund), her father (Mel Ferrer) and sister (Cristyn Sinclair) come looking for her. A dysfunctional married couple (Marilyn Burns and William Finley) and their daughter add to the body count. Meanwhile, the local sheriff (Stuart Whitman) is investigating disappearances in the area. Yelling and scything ensues.

Hooper's cotton candy-colored nightmare has never received much respect, but Arrow Video's superb Blu-ray release should change that. More mental than coherent, *Eaten Alive* is down and dirty fun. Brand sweats and stumbles and cuts down his clientele with feral looks before feeding them to his mostly unseen rubber reptile. Buck (Englund) is rarin' to fuck, and Marilyn Burns is put through the ringer for the woman in Hooper's previous film.

The selling point, though, is the new, super-high-def transfer, as most of the tapes are poor copies from the Dark Sky DVD.

Now, I've never shied away from the revenge subgenre. *Last House on the Left* (1972), *House on Your Own* (1978), the *2001* remake, the



most recently, *Revenge Is Her Middle Name* (2011), have all stained this page. They're exploitive and visceral modern morality plays that appeal to our reptilian notion of vengeance. An innocent woman is sexually brutalized, recovers, and exacts violent retribution on her tormentors. The victim-turned-vigilante triumphantly hacking off penises or shoving shotguns up the rectums of the men who violated her is powerfully cathartic. But when you remove the revenge aspect from the formula, you end up with something like Raffaele Picchio's *Morituri* (2011).

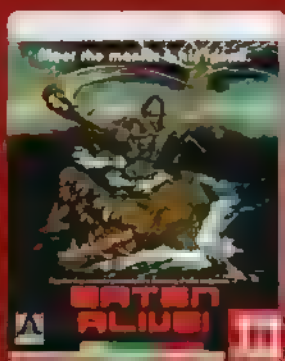
The opening prologue is shot Super 8mm-style. A young couple, their two children and the father's brother hike into the ruins of a Roman temple for a picnic on a idyllic summer afternoon. The uncle leads his young niece into the woods to molest her and is struck down by a mysterious attacker. The whirling camera then pans over the rest of the family, who have been similarly slaughtered. An animated credit sequence shows five Roman gladiators escaping their chains and impaling babies with spears and raping women, before being buried alive in a pit sealed with a stone engraved with the word *MORITURI*. Mic sustleaves (Photo by: [illegible])

For the bulk of the film, three seemingly charming Italian men invite a pair of Romanian women they'd met in a club the night before to a rave in the woods so they can viciously beat and rape them. They inadvertently arouse the attention of the doomed gladiators. In their pit.

Touted as a return to the gritty Italian exploitation films of the '70s and '80s, *Morituri* lacks the inherent moral compass displayed by films of that era. Even *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), arguably the most reprehensible example of Italian exploitation filmmaking of that time, had an underlying message. If there's one in *Morituri*, it's "never underestimate the nature of evil," as related in a telephone conversation by the presumed offsite leader of this gang of rapists, who later shoves a tube in a vagina so a mouse can crawl

The gore, by Italian FX maestro Sergio Stivaletti, comes with the monsters in the last third. There's a decapitation, a gender-bending recreation of Christ's last moments and a hammer-smashed face. The location is atmospheric and the lighting and cinematography suitably eerie.

The Synapse Blu-ray is superb, but only includes the theatrical trailer as an extra. If anything, these two films demonstrate that humour and/or vengeance provide balance to the uglier cinematic deeds of monstrous men.







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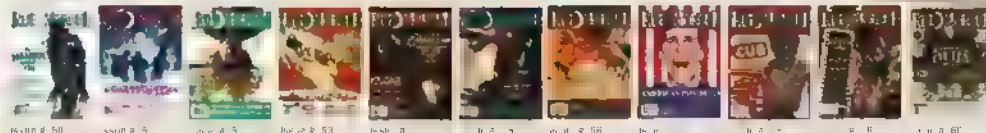
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## R. STR. ADE RECORDS

and ensures the tracks aren't mere homage. *Cub* is bleak – the eddying synths in “Casseiroque” are more typical of a lean, mean slasher score – but Moore adds hollow percussion hits that evoke the darkness of a labyrinthine forest, and his shape-shifting tones are quite artful. *Cub*'s design relies on simple thematic material, but Moore manages to express a variety of dread and desperation through minimal instrumentation. “The Treehouse” is especially moving (and recalls early Graeme Revell) with its plaintive violin emulations, organ figures and molten bass reverb, whereas the eleven-minute “The Hunt” has dripping tones and drainpipe reverb, with a gradual descent into grunge and bass. Very nicely done. 🍷🍷🍷



## Hexed

## INDEPENDENT

from a cool-yet-grisly opening track to bloody payback, before closing with an ode to a now-restful spirit.



## Phantasmagoric

## INDEPENDENT

Macabre-minded Grace & Tony evoke death, disease, murder and monsters with gusto and guts on *Phantasmagoric*. The husband-and-wife duo from Loretto, Tennessee, stitch together bluegrass, country and roots influences to tell tall tales of notorious corpse wranglers Burke and Hare ("Invitation to an Autopsy"), Frankenstein and his monster ("Adam of Labour"), a stalker and his target ("The 1") and Poe-inspired sickness ("Lullaby of the Red Death") that are both beautiful and bloody-minded. Cello, violin, mandolin, acoustic guitar and drums offset his-and-her vocals and clever lyrics, with the album's highlight being the *Salem's Lot*-inspired "The Marsten Prologue" and "A Lot Dies Today," the latter sung from the

point of view of cowardly Constable Gillespie. ("I wipe the sweat with the cloth that once shined my gun / And I make my escape with protection from the sun ") More Southern Gothic than goth, *Phantasmagoric* is fairly fantastic ☠☠☠☠ SP



## Pylon

SPINEFARM RECORDS

Beyond frontman Jaz Coleman's face paint, Killing Joke is not spooky, nor has the music they have made over the past 38 years ever notably dealt in horror imagery. So why do we care? Because these fathers of meta-, industrial and death disco, (in their sound and intent), are truly scary. One critic astutely called their music "the sound of the Earth vomiting." Album fifteen is typically heavy Joke, with Paul Ferguson's fierce drums, Georgie Walker's distinctive guitar tones, Youth's heavy bottom end and Coleman ranting like a manic street preacher. The Joke's targets have not changed – geopolitics ("Dawn of the Hive"), corporate malfeasance



## Steve Moore

### REF APSE RECORDS

Steve Moore's latest soundtrack release unfolds like a Tangerine Dream score with fuzzy bass lines akin to something John Carpenter would come up with while seriously pissed off. It's this fusion of elements that gives the score its dramatic contrasts.



## Nico Fidenco

DEPTH WATER REF. DUN. C.

Early '80s Italian splatter epic *Zombi Holocausto* (a.k.a. *Dr Butcher M.D.*) was made specifically to capitalize on the success of Lucio Fulci's *Zombi*, and the similarities are obvious. Less derivative is Nico Fidenco's score, a living, breathing mass of synth pulses, string instruments, hushed vocals, jazz-funk and tribal beats, far removed from Fabio Frizzi's masterful drones. In addition, Fidenco's score is geographically diverse, ranging from distinctly oppressive Italian horror compositions to fun, colourful themes for the film's exotic locations. Still, in the great Italian film recycling tradition, he reuses some of the tracks from his work for Joe D'Amato, notably *Emmanuelle* and *The Last Cannibals*. Death Waltz's release marks *Zombi Holocausto*'s first appearance on vinyl and, with thirteen previously unreleased cues, it is definitive. Two different versions, each boasting a variety of colour swirls, complement a score that's as vibrant and striking as the film. 🍌🍌🍌🍌 AVL



# LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

The murder ballad is one of the earliest forms of horror music, a genre of songs detailing murders – often crimes of passion and their aftermath – that dates back to the 17th century. When we think of murder ballads today, we think of grisly outlaw tales sung by the likes of Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings or Neko Case. When I first came across Murder Murder, a “bloodgrass” band from my hometown of Sudbury, Ontario, I knew I was onto something. Equal parts bluegrass and outlaw country, Murder Murder aims to mythologize Northern Ontario’s brutally cold, working-class landscape the same way traditional murder ballads have done for the American South, the Appalachians and Alaska during the Klondike years.

“People who are familiar with the murder ballad usually relate it to a certain geography,” explains banjo player/singer/songwriter Barry Miles. “Since the onset of this band we’ve been exclusively Northern Ontario. The history and the geography plays a role in these songs.”

Murder Murder, which was recently signed to IndieCan Records after the release of its indie album *From the Stillhouse*, cites the Reesor Siding Strike of 1963 as an example of the area’s violent history. It was a bloody labour confrontation that took place in what is now a ghost town, resulting in the shooting of eleven union members, leaving three dead.

Sam Cassio, who handles vocal, guitar and mandolin duties, adds, “The history that exists in some more storied places also exists in the places we are from, so if murder ballad songwriters can find inspiration in their history, I figure we can too.”

Like their music, a fiery mix of folk, alt country and hillbilly foot stomping, Murder Murder makes a point of deviating from the murder ballad formula.

“There are certain motifs that keep happening in murder ballads, like the cheating lover, a drowning, etc., so we started intentionally screwing up the formula,” says Cassio. We’ve got songs where the woman is

the killer. ‘Duck Cove’ on the new record is a gay love triangle that ends in two deaths. ‘Ballad of the Lonely Hermit’ is inspired by a book I read about how someone can realize they have a penchant for becoming a serial killer. We stir the pot a bit.”

Right now Murder Murder remains a uniquely Canadian band that recognizes its own distinct landscape as a resource for blood-curdling tales.

“Ultimately, we’re trying to create a mythology. If you are meant to believe there are scorned lovers in the Appalachian Mountains, there’s certainly going to be scorned lovers in Northern Ontario. The beauty that is portrayed in some of these areas in folk music also exists where we live. There are lots of lakes. Lots of places to hide a body.”

AARON VON LUPTON

(“New Jerusalem”), environmental disaster (“Into the Unknown”) and conspiracy (“I Am the Virus”) – but joy and celebration always underlie their sonic admonishments. Lots of bands are heavier, louder, faster and more evil, but Killing Joke remains the sound of joyful doom.

SP



## BLEED

The Hatred Inside

INDEPENDENT

Reminisce back to 1971’s *Tombs of the Blind Dead*: skeletal Knights Templar atop black steeds galloping in slow-motion across the plains. That’s the ominous pace of Bleed’s introductory, eponymous instrumental album. Now, flash forward a couple of decades to when thrash metal could actually make the Billboard Top 40, capitalizing on a sound somewhere between the frenzy of Slayer and the groove-laden stomp of Pantera. Now skip ahead another twenty years or so and ask yourself just how much you miss that sound, because it’s going to determine whether Bleed is essential to your collection. Sure, guitarist Ron Kratky unleashes some pleasingly caustic soloing throughout and Mike Bell’s bass really begins to shine on closers “Conquer” and “Hate March Kill,” but, much like their odes to zombies and killing, Bleed tends to walk on the wrong side of the line separating “genre” from “generic.” GT



## CROPSY MANIAC / BURIAL GROUND / GRAVE WAX / SEVERED LIMBS

Four Paths to Horror

HORROR PAIN GORE DEATH PRODUCTIONS

There are plenty of chances to play “spot the horror reference” on this four-way split of similar yet clearly

distinguishable death metal acts. Cropsy Maniac kicks it off with four tracks of swamp-dwelling death-grind that gurgles and blasts much as you’d expect, with horror movie samples strewn hither and thither like so many hacked-off body parts. Burial Ground follows with three tracks that periodically hit the mark (the doomy “They Dwell”) but sometimes veer off course (the disjointed “Last House on the Left”). Grave Wax has a suitably bifarious name and is heavily indebted to ’90s era exports from Sweden and Finland. Its sound is choppy forceful, hampered by a puny production job and some morally dubious Shinya Tsukamoto homages. Closer Severed Limbs splices Morbid Angel with early Pestilence and is comfortable serving up both frantic blasts and soupy slower moments, offering the most palatable slime on an album that’s unlikely to set the world alight but still does its job well enough. AD



## SERIAL BUTCHER

Brute Force Lobotomy

UNIQUE LEADER RECORDS

Remember serial killer *cinéma vérité* shocker *Man Bites Dog*? It came from Belgium, also the exporter of extreme metal band Serial Butcher. We’re talking about classic death metal here, with all the mandatory touchstones. Triggered typewriter blast beats? Definitely. Intricate buzzsaw twin-riffing with squealing pinch harmonics? Yep. Mutant solos borrowed from Slayer’s *Reign in Blood*? Check. Indecipherably slick Cookie Monster-type vocals? Got it. Blood-drenched cover art? You bet. Grim and grotesque song titles/lyrics? Of course. Does that make it disposable? Hell no. This two-decade-old band definitely knows how it’s done. Think classic old school pioneers Cannibal Corpse and Death meets the young meiotic surgeons from Decapitated and The Faceless. Beware of this brutal record, as one track warns, you’ll get “Facialized By a Flamethrower.” KG



THE CHILLING, THRILLING ELECTRIC  
VIOLIN LEGACY OF NASH THE SLASH IS  
RESURRECTED ON VINYL

# RANDAGLES AND STRINGS

AARON  
VON LUPTON

**D**ESPITE A NEARLY 40-YEAR CAREER THAT INCLUDED COLLABORATIONS WITH THE LIKES OF GARY NUMAN, TORONTO'S NASH THE SLASH REMAINS MOSTLY A MAN OF MYSTERY. Wrapped in surgical bandages, sporting welder's goggles and decked out in a coat and top hat, Nash (real name Jeff Plewman) made eerie electronic music, progressive rock, twisted pop and original soundtrack work with his trademark electric violin and mandolin. He died last year at the age of 66, leaving behind a legacy of innovative music that remains mostly underground. It's a body of work waiting to be rediscovered, as much of his back catalogue was out of print and is now being reissued by Toronto's Storming the Base and Artofact Records.

"Nash always preferred vinyl over any other format," says Trevor Norris, Nash's business partner and now official caretaker of his legacy. "He would always say that the crackle and noise from vinyl worked in harmony with his abrasive fuzzed-out mandolin and violins and slightly distorted drum machine tracks. I think he'd be thrilled that these releases are being put into a format they were originally intended to be listened to on."

First up from Storming the Base are Nash's studio albums *Bedside Companion* (1978), *Dreams and Nightmares* (1979), *Children of the Night* (1980) and legendary live album *Hammersmith Holocaust* (1980), a treat for hardcore fans who until now would have to shell out over \$200 for this "official bootleg" recording. It will feature liner notes by Gary Numan.

"Nash told me he was touring with Gary Numan at the time he was waiting for his *Children of the Night* album to be released," Norris recounts. "He said they desperately needed something to send to radio and to the press to promote the upcoming release, so his sound guy, Michael Dent, took a stereo board feed to a cassette player and recorded both nights opening for Gary Numan. Nash and Michael choose the best five tracks from the two recordings, pressed a limited 300 copies on vinyl, hand stamped all of them in their apartment and gave them away as promos. It is still

one of the rarest recordings in Nash's catalogue."

While *Children of the Night* remains Nash's best known album, *Dreams and Nightmares* is likely of most interest to horror fans. It's a synth-heavy record inspired by that era's horror scores, centred around Nash's ten-minute soundtrack to the 1929 silent surrealist short film *Un Chien Andalou*, which he famously played at a screening in the Roxy Theatre in Toronto on March 17, 1975.

"Nash decided to dress very formal in black tails and a black top hat and welder's glasses (no bandages yet)," recalls Norris. "This would end up being the template for his eventual Nash the Slash look. The performance was to be the opening slot before a midnight screening of the Rolling Stones' *Gimme Shelter* film, which was garnering a lot of attention. ... *Un Chien Andalou* is only eighteen minutes—just long enough to keep a stoned, captive audience of 700 Rolling Stones fans' attention. The whole gig went over famously and was the talk of Toronto. He always thought it was funny and was proud of the fact that his first gig was opening for the Rolling Stones."

Fans can now hear such classic material at its original length, as well, instead of the versions that appeared on subsequent CD releases, which had shortened tracks. It's all part of the process of unwrapping the legacy of a truly unique practitioner of dark music.

"First and foremost Nash was an innovator," states Norris. "He is one of the godfathers of electronic industrial music. His creative use of synths and keyboards, along with fuzzed-out mandolin and violin melodies were so unique and really groundbreaking. His love for the horror genre was always just a part of his aesthetic—from his Nash the Slash persona [to his] album art, his show visuals and even down to his décor in his house. I think he would be very happy to know his music is getting re-released for his long-time fans and also for a whole new group of fans. The goal is to keep Nash's legacy relevant and make sure his enormous contribution to the world of music and art is recognized and revered for generations to come."





# 2014 TRAILER

## MAD MAX, SPOOKY'S HOUSE OF JUMP SCARES



### MAD MAX

Windows, Xbox One, PlayStation 4

Like this summer's cinematic blockbuster it's based on, *Mad Max* lives up to the hype. It's a standalone game that doesn't directly connect with *Mad Max: Fury Road* (take note, *Imperator Furiosa* fans, she doesn't appear in this title), but the frenetic car-crash energy is on point with the film and the immersive post-apocalyptic environment is so well-executed you can almost smell the guzzolene.

Pushed to the brink of insanity after the loss of his family, our titular character makes the mistake of driving through some territory belonging to sadistic warlord Scabrous Scrotus. Max and Scrotus both survive the ensuing confrontation, but Scrotus' war boys make off with Max's most prized possession: his Interceptor. Stranded, he befriends hunchbacked mechanical genius Chumbucket, who has determined that Max is the mythical "driver" foretold in the prophecies, and is willing to help him acquire the Big Chief (a coveted V8) to build the most magnificent of vehicles, the Magnum Opus, which players can customize by scavenging bits to upgrade the body, paint job, performance and handling, as well as add side flames and spikes to fend off attackers. The pair

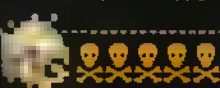


then sets off to liberate factions and strongholds from Scrotus' power, while building up allies for the final showdown.

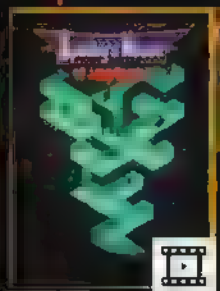
Granted, Max Rockatansky has seen a lot of shit, but he also can be a bit of a dick to other characters – including those trying to help him – as a result, it's hard to want him to persevere. Nonetheless, if the playable

protagonist doesn't grab you, the environment will – the swirling sandstorms are so authentic, you can practically feel the grit in your teeth. The combat controls are simple enough, the weapons are suitably bombastic and the minimal HUD really lets you soak up the scenery, which is where the game truly shines. In short, there's enough doom, vroom and ka-boom to please fans of the films and open-world gamers alike. Buckle up!

ANDREA SUBISSATI



**HEADSHOTS:** INCREDIBLE ATMOSPHERE, SIMPLE CONTROLS, PLenty TO SEE, DO AND EXPLORE  
**MISFIRES:** MISSION OBJECTIVES NOT ALWAYS CLEAR



### SPOOKY'S HOUSE OF JUMP SCARES

PC  
Lag Studios

If successful indie games have taught us anything, it's that simplicity is good. Crude graphics and gimmicky concepts earn a pass if the tone is right and the game is playable, which is something the developers at Lag Studios (*Akuma Kira's Day Off*) understand. Visually, *Spooky's House of Jump Scares* looks like a lovechild of *Doom* and *Minecraft* raised by *Pokémon*, but its immersive environments and quirky humour combine to make an incredibly addictive game that'll have you laughing as you spew jump-scare-induced profanity.

The plot is straightforward. The ghostly Spooky has invited you to her house of jump scares. You're equipped with only classic first-person shooter controls (look, move, run, activate) to navigate an endless maze of blocky rooms. Each floor of Spooky's mansion has a different theme (wood cabin, stone dungeon, for-

est, locker-lined high school hallway) and is haunted by a monster, which when discovered will chase you, delivering damage until your health runs out. The good news is there are notes interspersed throughout the maze to give you an idea of what you're up against (e.g. spiders that live in the ceiling, green slime-guys or life-size marionette The Merchant, who spawns directly behind you), and while the monsters get faster and more powerful as the levels progress, it's usually pretty easy to outrun them. Still, when the game decides to change tone from cutesy, self-aware humour to ominous, isolated doom, you feel it *big time*, and that's when the jump scares are most effective.

Despite *Spooky's* minimal graphics and repetitive rooms, its charm will hold your interest. There are even mini-arcade games peppered throughout, so you can escape the



trials of the mansion to play as Spooky in a *Pac-Man*-style interface, or help her stab as many victims as she can in a fast-paced side-scroller. Basically, *Spooky's House of Jump Scares* is way more fun than it has any right to be, and it's free to download on Steam, so what are you waiting for?

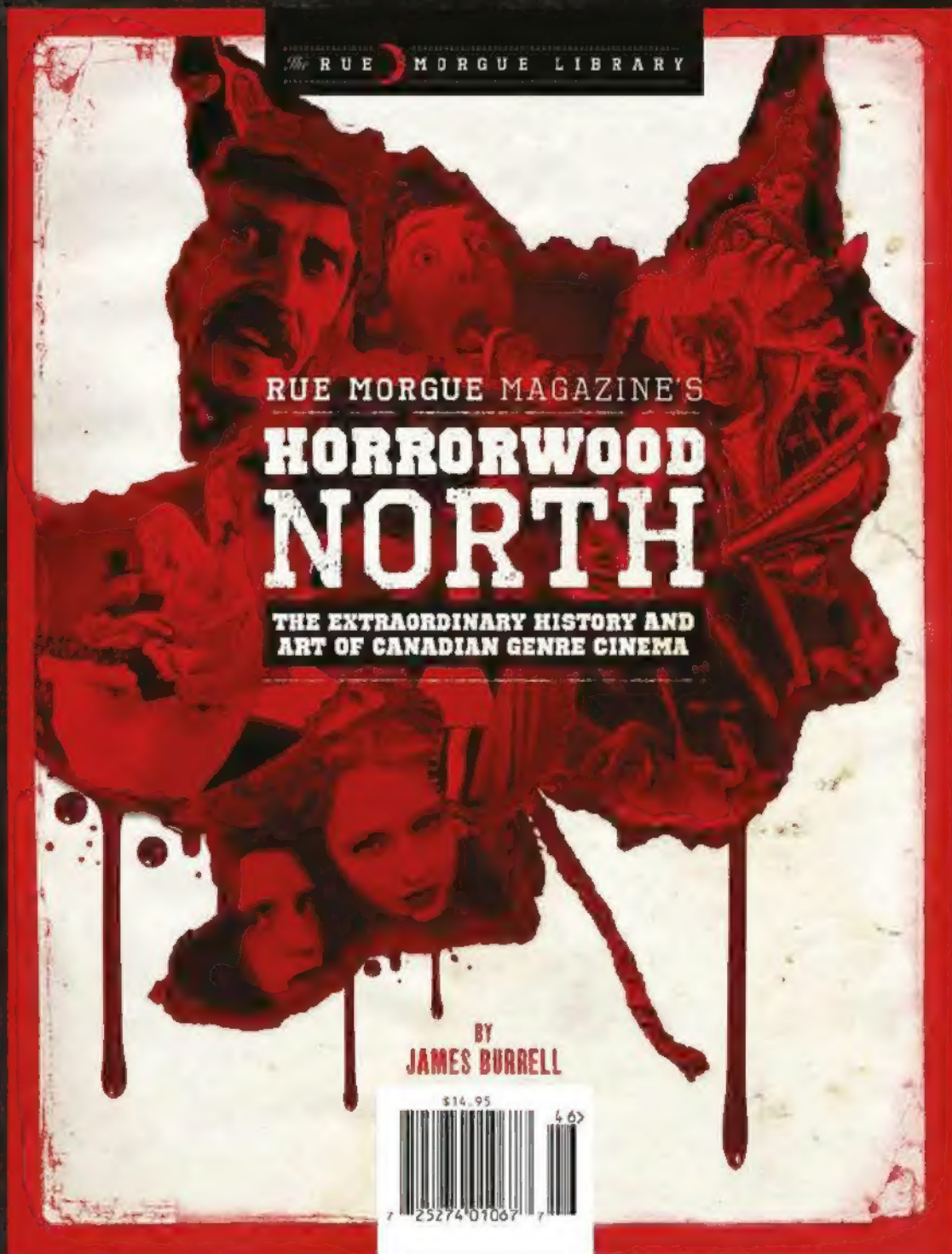
ANDREA SUBISSATI



**HEADSHOTS:** CHARMING, GREAT ATMOSPHERE AND REPLAY VALUE, FREE  
**MISFIRES:** ENEMY ATTACKS COULD BE BETTER RENDERED



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# CLASSIC CUT

## STRUWWELPETER

DR. HEINRICH HOFFMAN  GERMANY - 1845

**P**eruse the children's section of any well-stocked bookstore today and you'll discover a slew of genre tales involving vampires, wizards and mythological creatures. Still, you'd have to step back well over a century to come across the likes of Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* ("Shockhead Peter"), a series of verses so grisly and grotesque, it's hard to believe they were written for children.

Pronounced *Strool'vel-pay-ter*, the ten stories comprising the anthology involve no less than a girl who plays with matches and gets burned to death, a thumb-sucking boy who has his offending digits chopped off by a tailor, and Shockhead Peter himself, a freakish boy who does not cut his hair or nails – and who would seem a direct template for Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (despite the director's insistence to the contrary).

You'd be hard-pressed to get a parental endorsement for this tome of terror today. And yet, Hoffman's book is one of the most widely published children's books in Germany, right up there with the Brothers Grimm.

Its origins are truly D.I.Y. Hoffman was an MD living in Frankfurt. Come Christmas 1844, he was searching bookshops for a present for his three-year-old son but found most children's books to be either boring or too instructive, lacking an engaging hook. So he decided to make his own, writing a few stories in verse and sketching out some illustrations.

Friends saw Hoffmann's work and were impressed. Bolstered by the encouragement, he published the stories under the pseudonym Reimerich Kinderlieb. Selling out 1500 copies in four weeks, he added more stories and pushed the *Struwwelpeter* tale to the front of the book (which adopted the infamous image as its cover). A publishing phenomenon was born.

In its wake, other cautionary tales that fused humour and horror, such as Hilaré Belloc's *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts* (1896), were published. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Lewis Carroll even references *Struwwelpeter* and its ilk, noting that Alice "had read several nice little histories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts and other unpleasant things."

*Struwwelpeter* was also one of the first children's books

to balance text and image, setting the style for modern kids' titles. Maurice Sendak, celebrated author/illustrator of *Where the Wild Things Are*, praised the book's revolutionary look, noting that "graphically...[*Struwwelpeter* is] one of the most beautiful books in the world."

Today, Hoffmann's drawings remain surprisingly lurid – there's spurting blood coming from the thumb-sucker's severed digits, while Harriet, the girl who played with matches, is seen engulfed in flames.

It's telling that the public was (and still is) drawn to such vivid depictions of pain and death, particularly when filtered through comedic verse. Through graphic hyperbole, it reinforces that misbehaviour comes with dire consequences. *Struwwelpeter's* iconic imagery and its humorously macabre bent would later inform the works of Edward Gorey (*The Gashlycrumb Tinies*) and permeate the writings of Lemony Snicket and Roald Dahl. In particular, Dahl's classic *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* owes a debt to *Struwwelpeter*, as the lucky guests to Wonka's factory meet grim ends after failing to heed the candy maker's warnings.

Now 170 years old, the book has been published in 35 different languages and in several hundred German editions alone. Mark Twain himself penned an English translation, called *Slovenly Peter*, in 1935. In 1998, the book was translated into a successful off-Broadway musical that also hit London's West End. And, in a 2006 episode of the sitcom *The Office*, Dwight Shrute is seen reading the "Tale of the Thumb-Sucker" to a group of young children, as his boss is horrified.

Scholar and Grimm translator Jack Zipes noted that at the time of its publication "no other book of its kind unleashed a series of imitations that celebrated corporal punishment in the way it did. In numerous picture books that followed and imitated *Struwwelpeter*, children are brutally beaten, thrown into dark cellars and dungeons." Though the book's original intent to help socialize the middle class may be lost on readers today, *Struwwelpeter's* unique fusion of humour and horror for such a young readership remains a benchmark of children's genre literature.

JEFF SZPIRGAS



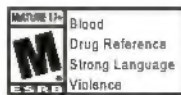


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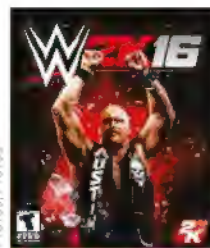
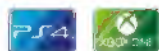
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